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BLONDEL PARVA.

Mrs. Wulford
with Laura Hayn's
affectionate regards.

BLONDEL PARVA.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD,"

ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO
THAT BEST OF FRIENDS,
MY WIFE,
This Book
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

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BLONDEL PARVA.

CHAPTER I.

A REASONABLE OFFER—REFUSED.

OF all the old-world, out-of-the-way hamlets on the south coast of England (and they are many), nestled amid rolling downs, and wearing a deep inland look, although almost within hearing of the passionate sea, Blondel Parva is the least and the fairest. It does not attain even to the dignity of a village. It boasts, indeed, of an old manor-house, not by any means complying with the exigencies of modern life, but with an imposing massiveness about it too, such as builders do not arrive at in these days; with a large, carelessly ordered garden, sheltered

by mouldering and ivied walls ; with an old fishpond, that would perhaps be better for cleaning out and for a bottom of concrete, but with whose muddy depths and weed-strewn surface the fat carp, those most conservative of fish, are very well content ; with a broad terrace looking to the west, that should be of gravel, but where the grass grows so luxuriantly that it usurps its place ; and with an ancient bowling-green, where, in the July heats, it is pleasant to sit and let the fancy rove, without bias, like the bowls themselves, out of whose lamprey eyelet holes the lead has dropped, since, for all I know, the time when the old house-roof was stripped of the same metal to furnish bullets for Cromwell's men.

Throughout the summer months, there is a glorious scent about the place of wall-flowers and thyme, a fine old English aroma of sweet smells, with which, at least in the bees' opinion, no glass-house, heated to the

most exact temperature, and stored with costliest exotics, can compare: they hum and murmur their applause here from morn to eve, and in the long lime-walk, leading to the banks of Start, so thickly cluster, you would almost think that there was organ-music in the scented air. The black-birds, too, give thanks (with full choral service) for the clustering peaches, which Mrs. Irby's dexterous fingers, deftly as they ply, cannot make net-armour enough to shield.

Mrs. Irby is the lady of the manor, but by no means so wealthy or important as such a title may seem to imply. It is because she is not rich that the old place possesses these charms of unkempt luxuriance and picturesque decay. The terrace would doubtless be new gravelled, the pond cleaned out, the garden-walls rebuilt, instead of being merely propped as they were with timber, or strengthened with Xs of old iron, if Madam could have her way. Similarly,

if she could but afford it, hateful reforms would, without doubt, be effected within the mansion : the old tapestry that blows about in the great hall, and shows through many a rent the plaster behind it, would be replaced by a neat paper from London ; the broad oak staircase would have a carpet laid upon it ; and down the long gallery, once hung with pictures, but now bare enough, one would be able to walk without slipping. I have no faith in the best of women (and Madam, as the villagers call her, is a most excellent one) as respects reverence for antiquity : they like change ; they will always beckon the upholsterers into a house if they can pay, and sometimes if they can't. They have a morbid passion for cleanliness and precision, such as is only seen in jails and light-houses ; they like everything about them to be spick-and-span. But Blondel manor-house was fortunately so large, and Madam's spare cash so scanty,

that any scheme of “thorough” in the way of amendment was out of her power ; while piecemeal reform, she was well aware, would only make the rest of the old place, by contrast, more “ramshackly.” Her conversation was homely, and that was her own graphic term. “There was nothing for it,” said she, speaking of this picturesque dilapidation, “but to bide until her ship came in.” There was more chance in Mrs. Irby’s case of her ship coming in—a possibility, indeed, of the arrival of a whole argosy—than there commonly is with persons who are in the habit of using this expression ; but we will speak of that hereafter.

There is one room in the old house, however, which, I think, even in the eyes of Mrs. Irby, could not be bettered by alteration, and that is Kate’s boudoir. Madam is a widow, and Kate is her only daughter, for whom she lives, in whom she has her sole pleasure, and who is the one link that binds

her to earth. To most people, however, Kate Irby seemed more like a link with heaven—so tender was her air, so kind and bright her dark-blue eyes, so pure her brow, so exquisitely fair her oval face. This last, indeed, was said by certain hypercritics to be too pointed at the chin, and the chin (these idiots added) is the principal feature of a countenance, and of far more consequence than all the rest, including the eyes. Well, well, if you, good reader, could only have seen Kate as I see her now, in my mind's eye, you would know how to despise those detractors.

The boudoir, then, was a bower fit for such a gracious fairy. There was a harmonium of the newest fashion, from which she evoked (mostly when alone, however) the most touching melodies; books, new as well as old, lined the walls from floor to ceiling, and without one forbidding pane of glass to screen them; an easel, with a half-

finished sketch upon it, from a certain venerable place to which you shall be introduced in time ; and on the table, work—not crochet or any other such fal-lal, but good honest needle-work, for Kate “ mended her own things,” as well as made warm garments for half the old women in the parish, and baby-clothes for the young mothers. The carpet was really a handsome one, and such as had not its fellow in all the house ; and the rest of the furniture was in keeping with that on which it stood. The windows opened southward upon the lime-walk, and looked down in the distance upon the hurrying Start. About this river hung a sad story. A mournful memory ever came in from that swift river, and was especially borne upon the summer air, along with the murmur of the bees and the odour of the limes, and touched Kate’s heart with love and pity. Ten years ago, when she was a child of ten, her father had been drowned

while bathing in that dangerous stream one summer morning. His body, carried out to sea by the fierce current, had never been recovered. It was denied to wife and child to know where his bones lay whitening; they only knew that somewhere in "that vast and wandering grave, they tossed with tangle and with shell."

The boudoir opened on a sleeping-room, looking down on the terrace-walk. This was very plainly furnished: the bed-gear was as white as milk; the chest of drawers of plain white deal; and the little dressing-table, with its vase of flowers and Kate's Bible, was covered with a clean white linen cloth, spotless as ever was lain upon church-table. There is a temptation to write that those two rooms might well have typified the grace and cultivation, the purity and piety, of their occupant; but we will, if possible, avoid exaggeration. Kate Irby was a good and accomplished girl, but she would

have been better than human to have received no hurt from the associations of her youth, which had not been favourable either to simplicity or refinement. Her father had been a betting-man by profession (at least he had had no other calling, although at one time he possessed large private means), and we know what sort of society that leads a man to keep; and as for Kate's other parent, the good honest soul would herself frankly acknowledge that she had not "mixed much with gentlefolk." Her family were of the yeoman class—"our country's pride," it may be, but, if so, certainly not on account of their intellectual culture.

Kate always averred that her mother spoiled her in thus allotting the pleasantest sitting-room in the old manor-house for her sole use and benefit; but the truth was, not only did her greatest happiness lie in seeing her daughter pleased, but Mrs. Irby, for her

own part, had no pleasure in boudoirs whatever. When she was not actively engaged about the house, which generally was the case, she was to be found "looking out" the snowy linen for the weekly use of the household, or "preserving," or doing some other housewifely duty in a half-underground apartment, called the housekeeper's room (although no such functionary had ever existed in her time), the casement of which opened on the vegetable part of the walled garden, and admitted a fine flavour of onions. At a certain period of the year, she was also to be found in a dilapidated bower, called the greenhouse (smelling strongly of mould and matting), potting plants. "Whenever I please," said she, when expostulated with upon the humility of her choice of private sitting-rooms, "I am always welcome in Kate's parlour" [on the pronunciation of the word boudoir, as being of French origin, she did not venture]; "and what should an

old woman like me need more than that? Why, nothing."

No visitor, indeed, was so welcome to Kate as her mother, and many a half-hour did the latter spend, entranced with some growing picture, or listening with folded hands to those grand harmonies which, she knew not why, used to fill her with such tender melancholy. It needed the sharp and sudden reflection, that something wanted "looking to" in the domestic economy, to tear the good body away, and a smothered "Drat that cook!" (in the midst of a melody of Beethoven's) not seldom resented the necessity of departure.

There was another person at present under this roof, far more capable of understanding, if not of sympathising with Kate's pursuits, who had also, by right of relationship, the *entrée* of that boudoir, but who was not by any means so welcome there. This was Kate's cousin—or rather her late

father's cousin, for he was but distantly connected with the Irbies—Richard Anstey. He was only eight-and-twenty, or so ; but he might have been taken, from his air and manner, even more than from his appearance, to have been many years older. A handsome fellow enough, tall and well-made, with keen gray eyes, perhaps somewhat too hard in their expression ; fine black hair, “a little thinning about the top,” Mr. Truefitt's young men had warned him for some time ; and a forehead that might have looked better if the baldness had taken place there, for it was a low one. His teeth, too, were bad—victims to excessive smoking—which was the reason, perhaps, why he so rarely smiled. He was not a great talker, but what he said was generally sensible, and always to the point. Indeed, his misfortune was to be a little too practical in his ideas, and to express them without sufficient regard to the feelings of others. He did not

even perceive, for instance, that when talking to a young lady whose pecuniary interests are unhappily in antagonism with our own, we should avoid, by all means, money-matters as a topic of *tête-à-tête* conversation.

“Uncle Nicholas is very ill,” said he, as he sat at the open window of his cousin’s prettily furnished bower, strumming with one hand upon the sill, and holding in the other an open letter. “I should not wonder, from what this doctor writes, if the old man did really die this time.”

“I hope not,” returned Kate gravely, pausing in the sketch on which she was engaged, with her back to her cousin: “I hope that he may not be thus cut off in the midst of his sins.”

“Just so,” observed the young man drily; “though, as to that, it is my opinion that the longer he lives the worse Sir Nicholas will get. He is not the sort of man to hedge, bless you—not he.”

“I do not understand you, Cousin Richard.”

This was not quite correct; she knew very well what he meant—how could the daughter of Robert Irby—nicknamed, from his good-fortune on the race-course, the Netter—fail to do so? Only she did not choose to show her knowledge, but her displeasure.

“Now, don’t be angry, Kate,” said he soothingly. “The truth is, from having been brought up as much in the stable as out of it, I express myself best in the language of the turf; but I mean no disrespect to religion.—Seriously, then, I am informed in this communication that Sir Nicholas is in a very bad way, and like to die. I am pressed to start for Anstey Court at once, if I would see him alive. Under these circumstances, I would like to have a word with you.”

He paused, and she bowed curtly in assent. He folded up the letter twice, and once again

before he spoke. In the meantime, she went on painting.

“You have been out of favour with my uncle for many years, Kate.”

“I was only in it for six months, Richard. He took a fancy to me, quite a little child, when he was staying here ; and when my poor father and he quarrelled, shortly after, the fancy left him.”

“True. But while it lasted, it was strong enough to cause him to leave you half his fortune, excepting a beggarly five hundred pounds to myself, his own nephew and next of kin.”

“I have heard so.”

“Heard so ? You know such was the fact, Kate ; and although, when that row took place at the Court, he got back the will from your father, which he had given to him to keep, in token of the genuineness of his bequest, and destroyed it before his very eyes (as I have heard), my uncle has always

had a liking for you. You are an outsider in the great race for Who shall be Heir, Kate, but still you are not quite out of the betting."

"I understood that your uncle had made, more recently, a will in *your* favour, Richard."

"So he did ; but he may have made fifty other wills since then. There is no knowing into what gutter he may not throw his money at the very last. In the first place, he is naturally so whimsical and impulsive, that a pretty face—even a child's, as in your case, although, of course, you were not to blame in the matter—may alter his most settled plans ; and, secondly, he is surrounded by the most worthless and designing lot of people you can possibly imagine. It would not be right for me to dwell upon that subject in your presence, Kate, but, as you are aware, one-half of my uncle's fortune is certain—whoever gets the other half—to be devoted to those who, in the eye of the

law, are (very properly) nobodies, although his own flesh and blood ; it has already been so settled by deed of gift ; and the bulk of it (as I understand) to a certain person who is not even related to him.”

As there is nothing for which a young girl of sensibility is more grateful than for advice in some delicate matter, delicately offered by a fit and proper person, so there is nothing she resents more deeply than the introduction of an embarrassing subject of conversation by one in whom she has little confidence, and for whom she has small liking. Kate's countenance grew crimson while her cousin spoke ; her lips shut tightly together, and her trembling fingers could scarcely direct the brush ; but she still painted on ; and Richard himself, only glancing towards her furtively from time to time, of course could not see her face, nor did he notice her annoyance.

“ It is useless,” he went on, “ to endeavour

to convince my uncle of the injustice he has committed against his lawful heir. It is half his fortune only that has any chance of coming my way, or"—

"Really, Mr. Anstey," interrupted Kate, turning sharply round upon her cousin, "my advice upon such matters as you speak of can be scarcely worth your asking. I don't understand business—if, indeed, the disposition of a gentleman's property before he be dead comes under that denomination—and, moreover, it does not interest me."

"Nonsense, my dear girl." He would have laid his hand upon her shoulder, but that she drew sharply away—"everybody is interested in what concerns themselves. This half-fortune—no trifling bequest, as you are aware—may come, I was about to say, your way, and not mine; there is a chance of it, though not an equal chance. You know there is. Your mother herself is always talking of what is to be done to the

old manor-house in case Sir Nicholas should remember his godchild ; though I should think, for that matter, the spiritual tie between him and you was even more slender than the kinship."

"I do not wish to converse about Sir Nicholas Anstey's will, Richard."

"Of course not, Kate : money is doubtless not so pleasant a subject for a young woman like you to talk about as music, poetry, and the fine arts ; but when money can be realised by verbal agreement, I am sure your mother would agree with me that we should not lose it for want of the words."

Kate uttered an exclamation half of weariness, half of downright annoyance, laid down her paint-brush, and confronted her cousin face to face.

"You have been endeavouring to force this conversation upon me for some days, Richard ; you have seen that it is very distasteful to me, and yet you persist. Well, I

am now ready to listen to you, but, remember, it is once for all."

"If it annoys you, I will not proceed, Kate. I am sure I beg your pardon. Let us put it off to another time."

"No, Richard ; now or never."

"Then go on with your painting ; I really cannot say what I have to say while you stand so, like the Sphinx waiting for her riddle to be answered."

"You need not look at me ; you can cast down your eyes, cousin, as you usually do when you are speaking to people. Please to begin."

Without noticing this unpromising remark, except by the very slightest contraction of his narrow forehead, Richard Anstey did as he was bid.

"Do you remember, Kate, a game of cards called Fright, at which we two used to play when you were a child, and I half a boy and half a man ?"

“Yes. The cards were thrown on the table upon their faces, and we drew by turns for one agreed upon. Whoever got it received the half-crown that poor papa used to put in for the pool. I remember you used generally to win it.”

“Well, Kate, when, as sometimes happened, there were but three cards left with the winning card among them, and it was my turn to draw, do you recollect what we used to do then?”

“Perfectly,” answered she smiling. “You used to propose to divide the stake in what you called the proper proportion of our chances. You gave me sixpence, and took the two shillings for yourself: you ought (I have since discovered) to have only taken one-and-eightpence.”

“I don’t recollect that,” observed the young man coolly; “I only remember that we used to divide.”

“I remember both circumstances, Richard.

But pray, go on. I confess I do not feel the same interest in this allegory (for I suppose it is such) as I did in the game itself."

"Wait a moment, cousin : you will feel it presently. The stake that you and I are now playing for—which we *must* play for whether we will or not—is more than half-a-crown, more, I am credibly informed, notwithstanding what has been cut off from the estate, than eight thousand pounds a year. My chances of drawing the right card as compared to yours are, however, not in this instance two to one—they are more than twenty to one—nay, they are a hundred to one ; and yet I am desirous to place you and myself upon exactly equal terms."

"What ! cousin ? You propose to divide this property into two equal shares, and to give me one of them. Is that indeed your proposition ?" He nodded.

"Well, Richard, although it is impossible for me to entertain such an offer for a

moment, yet, believe me, I am most sensible of its generosity. It is not only overwhelming, but forgive me if I add, unexpected. It is the very fanaticism of chivalry, and I have never taken you, cousin Richard, I confess, for a chivalric person. Since you have thus shown yourself in your true riding colours—which under that drab greatcoat of sagacity and calculation nobody could have guessed at—I also will be frank with you. I have never cared for money, and notwithstanding that you have often told me that everybody does care, I fancy you will allow there is some truth in my protest. I do not care for it now for my own sake, but I know that it would please my mother to see things about her a little less ruinous, and I should like her to have the means of making them so. Nay, I owe you the whole truth for having so uncharitably misread you hitherto. We are in debt, Richard—not much, but still a little ; and I know it would be an

immense comfort to my mother to be set quite free ; I should therefore be glad to feel that some small portion of my godfather's wealth would be mine for certain. I think, too, it is only just and fair that such should be the case, for you well know that over ten thousand pounds of it were won of my poor father under circumstances not altogether justifiable, even on the turf."

"Well, it was rather sharp practice," assented Richard, smiling unpleasantly to himself, "though the committee, to whom it was referred, decided in my uncle's favour. Your father went to the Court upon the matter in person, and there were mutual recriminations and quite a scene ; and in consequence thereof, Sir Nicholas's will was burned, and your good money went after your father's bad."

"Just so, Richard ; then, as I may say, it would be only right"——

"Stop a bit, Kate ; you mean *poetically*

right," interrupted the young man; "not legally right, of course, and far less morally right, since upon the turf there are no morals. Let us quite understand one another."

"By all means, Richard. I mean that, judged by any simple standard of justice, Sir Nicholas Anstey might well make restitution by bequest of that which he gained during his lifetime by overreaching his friend."

"It was a question of 'early information' about the breaking down of the Derby favourite," explained the young man; "Sir Nicholas and your father were partners, and one member of the firm sold the other."

"I say, cousin," continued the girl, with heightened colour, "that the transaction was shameful, and judged by any high standard—far less by that of such generosity as yours—he ought never to have touched the money. I am not seeking to detract from the nobility of your own motives, Richard,

but only to justify my taking advantage, in even a modified form, of your most handsome proposition.—I surely could not have misunderstood you,” added she suddenly, in a changed voice: “you did offer to give up half whatever your uncle should leave you, did you not?”

“Yes, Kate, yes.” The young man left the window-seat for the first time and stole his arm about his cousin’s waist; but she placed her hand upon his wrist, and kept him off with a steady grasp. With his disengaged hand, he played uneasily with his moustache, and stood biting his under lip, the very picture of irresolution and embarrassment. “It is not half eight thousand a year, but all of that I will give you, Kate, if you will only take the hand that offers it as well.”

“I see,” observed Kate coldly, and with a look of contempt it was impossible to misunderstand: “there is a condition. That

does detract from the generosity of your proposal, Mr. Anstey. While deeply sensible of the exaggerated value you have set upon me—quite a ‘fancy price,’ I am sure you will admit to yourself upon reconsideration—I feel compelled,” here she courtesied gravely, “to decline your very flattering offer.—Talk of ‘Fright,’ sir! yours is rather an historical proposition, borrowed from the reconciliation of the claims of York and Lancaster by marriage. If the royal succession depended upon my compliance, I believe my answer would be the same; but being only plain Kate Irby, and not a princess of the blood, I have no hesitation in replying in the negative.”

“You are cruel, Kate, unnecessarily cruel,” pleaded Richard Anstey. “I am more sorry than I can say to have thus offended you.”

“Offended me? Nay, I am penetrated with the sense of the honour you designed

for me, not to mention the gracefulness of the form in which your offer was couched."

Her eyes sparkled, her bosom heaved, her face glowed from chin to brow with contemptuous passion, and yet Richard thought he had never seen her beauty so glorious.

"You have misconstrued me, cousin—cruelly misconstrued me," said he quietly; "but I shall not attempt to exculpate myself. You may stand there, as you do, like the very type of beautiful Scorn; but when the unhappy object is removed, when you come to think of this matter alone, Kate, you will judge me more fairly. I am quite content to wait until your better nature asserts itself. You will then perceive why my proposal took the shape it did. To have told you that I loved you, to have spoken of regard, respect, devotion, would have merely been to say once more what (as I had hoped) my every action, look, air, words, have said already. But you thought me selfish,

grasping (you have confessed as much), a hard man of the world, as indeed I am ; but not to you, Kate, not to you. What is money to me, unless I win you ? Heaven knows it, nothing ! And with respect to your rights, do you suppose if my uncle should be so forgetful of common justice as to omit the mention of you in his will, that I should not redress that wrong, as soon as law and lawyers could do it ? ”

She shook her head, not contemptuously this time, only incredulously.

He felt that he was recovering lost ground. “ Suppose, Kate,” continued he with frankness, “ that this case were reversed. Should Sir Nicholas leave you his heiress, would *you* take all the law allowed you, and leave me penniless ? ”

“ You *know* I would not, Richard.”

“ Then why attribute to me—for you are doing so, Kate, what in yourself would seem an incredible baseness. You feel you have

done me wrong, I see. I do not ask you to confess it ; it is enough for me if you no longer misjudge me. I perceive my mistake, Kate. I have got my answer. But if we cannot be lovers, we are cousins, and ought to be friends. Come, take my hand, Kate ; forgive me, and forget this talk, and let us be to one another as before."

His supple fingers closed upon her plump, pink palm, and she returned their pressure.

"What a wretch I feel," said he, "now you are kind. You promised to take me to the spot from which that sketch was taken. I have not been to the old ruin for years. Let us go, then, after lunch. To-day will be my last chance ; I must start for Anstey Court by the mail-train at latest."

"After lunch then, by all means," assented she. "There goes the bell. I shall put my bonnet on at once. I daresay mamma will go with us, if you ask her."

A light nod and a bright smile passed be-

tween the cousins, as Richard left the room. The reconciliation was apparently effected, the mutual understanding quite complete. But no sooner was the door placed between them, than Kate Irby sank down in the chair, and hid her face in her hands. The large tears welled quickly through her fingers. It was her first offer, which always affects damsels in that manner, whether their affections are concerned or not. But Kate's tears were of a bitter sort; it is not pleasant for a young lady to be bid for by a suitor, at least at first hand. There is the same etiquette about it as about purchasing the next presentation to a living.

“He is a coarse unmannerly fellow,” murmured Kate, “and I wonder how dear mamma can encourage him so.”

Fortunately, Mr. Richard Anstey did not overhear this ebullition of feeling.

“By Jove!” muttered he, as he went slowly down the stairs, “I was very near

upsetting the coach. The idea of her supposing I was going to give her old Nick's fortune without any value received! But then one never knows how great a fool a woman may be until one tries her. She distinctly stated that I should have my full share of the estate, if it fell to her. That is something, at all events, though I wish I could have found an excuse for getting her to set it down in writing. And yet when I said that the money was nothing in comparison with herself, I spoke as near the truth as one is in the habit of hearing. And I'll wed Kate Irby yet; by Heaven, I will! This is only the first heat, and he who loses the first heat, don't always lose the race. Nay, since there is no rival in the matter, it is only a match against time, and I mean to win it."

CHAPTER II.

IN THE VICARAGE GARDEN.

BESIDES its manor-house, Blondel Parva owns a vicarage, which is in its way as charming, although neither so large nor so dilapidated. It can hardly be said to stand in its own grounds, so very scanty is the lawn that divides it from the village street, but then the street itself is so quiet and unpopulous that the parson's privacy is scarcely marred by that circumstance. At the back of the house there is a tolerably large garden, with one huge slumberous cedar, beneath whose layers of shade you can lie and watch the summer hazes shimmer upon the level flats, and the shining sea beyond them ; for the vicarage is on the hill-top, and commands

a view to southward such as the manor-house cannot pretend to.

It is nestled upon the very brow of what was once a bluff, jutting out into the sea ; but the great waters have left Blondel Parva this many a year, and more than a mile of salt-marsh now intervenes where once the stately ships went on, and even Leviathan himself, for it is certain that a whale was once stranded thereabouts, since near the cedar tree is an harbour, the entrance whereof is between its monstrous jaws. That was not, however, in the Rev. Charles Milton's time, the present *pro tem.* incumbent, nor even in that of the superannuated vicar ; while, as for the propinquity of the sea, it is eight hundred years since Blondel Parva was a port, albeit the fact is as certain as though the oldest inhabitant could certify to it of his own knowledge. Written books are extant, of a time when fiction by no means so engrossed our literature as at present,

wherein this village makes quite a figure as a haven. The Norman galleys landed there, and so harried the place, that one might imagine it had shrunk inland out of such marine contingencies. One of the most important of the feudal privileges of Blondel Priory was its right to wreck of the sea ; and in return, that loyal and religious foundation placed a vessel-of-war at the king's service, built at Blondel, and launched on the Start still a very rapid little river, though silted up as to its channels, and wholly un-navigable.

It was a strange sight, and evoked strange thoughts, even in the most thoughtless, to sit in that old-world garden, and look down upon what was once the deep's untrampled floor. Heard melodies are sweet, but those
*
unheard are sweeter, sings the subtle poet. It was sweet to listen to the distant monotone of yonder summer sea, but sweeter to the unheard ripple of the absent wave ; and

Maurice Glyn, college-friend of Mr. Milton's, and now staying with him at his second curacy, for the first time was vastly struck by it, as indeed, poetaster and *littérateur* as he was, he was bound to be. A good face had Maurice, although somewhat effeminate ; his silken hair and moustache making, by contrast of their jetty blackness, his pale skin white as milk ; and with his hazel eyes bright and restless as a bird's. Upon the whole, he had a foreign look ; while his friend the parson, with his tawny curling hair and florid cheeks, was every inch the Saxon.

“This view is suggestive as a graveyard, Charley,” is Maurice Glyn's remark, as he sits with his pipe in his mouth on the very edge of the bluff, and with his legs dangling over it—“it's quite as suggestive as a graveyard, and yet has nothing personal : none of that ‘As I am now, so you shall be’ about it. I like it much, and I am very glad I came to see you.”

“I am sure that *I* am glad, Maurice,” returned his host with a smile at the doubtfulness of the compliment. “I do think you will get on with your work here, at all events, as well as at fashionable Shinglebeach. There is nothing to distract your mind and interfere with composition at Blondel Parva: no German bands, no hurdy-gurdies, no charming young ladies—or, at least, only one.”

“And I don’t want to see her, Charley. I have got my heroine in my mind’s eye, and don’t wish to have the image deranged. I have come here to see *you*, old friend, and to finish my novel. Literature and friendship are enough for me at a time, and go very well together. Love is a disturbing element, and puts everything else out of your thoughts. You find that, don’t you, yourself?”

“Yes,” rejoined the other, musing: “that is,” added he, quickly, his countenance turning ruddier than apple in the sun, “I dare-

say you are right. I was speaking without thinking. What should a poor curate like me know about love?"

"Why, a deal more than the bench of bishops, of course.—Don't attempt to humbug *me*, Charley, for you can't do it. I recognised all the symptoms in you before we had been an hour together. You are most certainly in love—over head and ears and white choker; and since you tell me there is but one young lady in the place, I can make a shrewd guess at the beloved object. So you are captive to Miss Kate Irby, my friend. The arrow of love has gone home through that very strait waistcoat. Well, she is good, intelligent, and pretty, of course?"

"All three, Maurice."

"But, on the other hand, she has got no money—ch? Well, we can't expect everything; and yet she lives in a manor-house, you told me, which has a pleasant metallic sound about it too."

“*Vox et præterea nihil*, Charley,” answered the curate, cheerfully. “Miss Irby is very far from rich, thanks to a father who had a taste for horseflesh. I never saw him, for he died ten years ago; but, by all accounts, he was no great loss: indeed, pecuniarily speaking, his death was a gain; for he had insured his life very heavily, and the proceeds thereof enabled his widow to pay his debts, considerable as they were, and to stay on at the manor, although in greatly reduced circumstances. It would have been a bad day for my poor people, on which Madam Irby, as they call her, had had to leave Blondel.”

“And not a good day for their curate—eh, Charley? since she would probably have taken her daughter with her. Come, make a clean breast of it, and tell me the whole story: I was your confidant before, you know, in that affair of the pastrycook’s pretty daughter at ——. But there; I

won't talk about that now—it makes you feel quite a bigamist, I see. Come; what does your highly respectable uncle think of *this* matter?—for I remember he was averse to the other. If the young lady is not rich, she is, I daresay, of ancient lineage—belongs to ‘a county family’ (a charming expression to my mind), and so far would be satisfactory to the old gentleman.”

“Miss Irby is tolerably ‘well connected,’ as the phrase goes,” replied the curate, smiling. “Her nearest male relative is a baronet of large fortune—Sir Nicholas Anstey by name—and, by all accounts, one of the most unprincipled persons on the earth’s surface. But by the mother’s side she is but of humble origin. Mrs. Irby is a good, kind-hearted soul enough, but she is not a polished person.”

“Not a polished person! My good sir, you speak of her as if she were an Indian squaw who had omitted to oil herself. One

would think she was your mother-in-law already."

"Your intuition is mistaken for once, Maurice," observed the curate. "I did not intend to speak in Mrs. Irby's disparagement; indeed, she and I are particularly good friends."

"But she does not favour your suit, Charley; come—confess that. It is no use your laughing; I can see plainly that there is something wrong about that old lady. Perhaps"—here he turned, and laid his hand upon his friend's knee—"perhaps she favours somebody else?"

"Well, without at all acknowledging to the feelings you impute, Maurice, I do allow that why I entertain a less regard for Mrs. Irby than I otherwise should is, because she gives encouragement to a person wholly unworthy of it, as a suitor for her daughter's hand. True, she does not know, as *I* know"—here the curate's mild blue eyes

seemed to strike fire — “that Richard Anstey is an utter scoundrel; but she knows what ought to be enough to cause her to shut her doors against him—to prevent his staying under her roof, as he is doing now.”

“This Mr. Anstey, then, is the son of Sir Nicholas—eh?”

“No; Sir Nicholas has no legitimate issue; Richard is his nephew and heir-presumptive.”

“I see. The title and estates together make a very taking bait for a lady with a marriageable daughter. You must not be too hard upon the old lady, Charley. When a woman has had but an indifferent husband herself, and yet has managed to get on with him, she is not disposed to be exacting in the choice of a son-in-law: from a commendable disinclination to place her own dear Departed much under the average, she is led to think all men pretty much alike.

Perhaps, too, in this case, Madam herself, not being delicately sensitive, gives her daughter credit for equal robustness of character."

"You could not have described Mrs. Irby better, Maurice, if you had known her for years," returned the curate, admiringly. "Her late husband, however, though reckless and dissipated, and somewhat of a tyrant in his own house, had a sound place in his heart: the very extent of his life insurance shewed he had a genuine and unselfish regard for his own belongings; whereas this Richard Anstey is depraved, and yet cold and calculating. When I spoke so severely of Sir Nicholas a while ago, I wronged him thus far, that his nephew, while equally abandoned, is also, unlike him, both callous and cunning. Confound the fellow"—here the curate rose, and began to walk to and fro with hasty steps—"I cannot trust myself to talk about him!"

“All right, Charley. Don’t distress yourself,” returned Maurice, gravely. “I remember your morbid dislike to offensive people of old. There were half-a-dozen men up at Trinity with none of whom you could sit in the same room, you know.”

“Nay ; I recollect that was the case with yourself, Maurice,” observed the curate, laughing ; “but I am sure *I* had no such antipathies.”

“Well, perhaps it *was* myself,” answered the other with an air of reflection. “Indeed, now I think of it, I am *sure* it was. But I am quite changed in that respect, Charley. Next to an old friend like yourself, there is no one whose society delights me more than your utter reprobate. He must, however, have no redeeming points (and I am thankful to say that there are many people without them). He must be a scoundrel, pure and simple ; and, above all things, grossly insolent in his manner.

That is what gives him the great attraction, and me the zest. Then it is that I sketch him, *con amore*, from the life, and he adorns my next novel as its principal villain. Sweet are the uses of complete worthlessness, Charley, to us whose profession is that of writing fiction. One finds a balm, my dear fellow, this way, in even one's disagreeable relatives ; they may not be so exceptionably hateful as the great models of whom I speak, but, on the other hand, they afford better opportunities for observation."

"Well, upon my word, Maurice," exclaimed the curate, laughing, "literature seems to be a gracious trade. I daresay you manage to pick out a striking shadow or two even in the characters of your best friends, and I daresay you have combined business with pleasure in coming down to stay with *me*.—I wish I could overcome my dislike of this Mr. Anstey, so far as to oblige you with an introduction, but I really

cannot take you to the manor-house while he is there."

"Very good, Charley ; I shall survive it. Absence from that angel's home (I am speaking, of course, of Miss Kate, and not of Mr. Richard) is not, since I have never seen her, the rayless exile to me that it is to you. Let us visit, this afternoon, that ancient priory you were talking of. There is nothing more charming, to my mind—which, I hope, is naturally reverent—than a church in ruins. It has all the solemn sanctity of an ecclesiastical edifice in complete repair, and possesses, in addition, this inestimable advantage, that you can sit down in it and smoke."

CHAPTER III.

“NOTHING—NOTHING WHATEVER.”

EIGHT years ago, when Charles Milton and Maurice Glyn graduated at Cambridge, after three years of unbroken college intimacy, there was no marked difference in their ways of life, or even their habits of thought; and now there was scarcely anything in common between them, save their friendship.

At the epoch I speak of—to many the turning-point of life, the spot from which its roads often diverge, some up, some down, so widely, that thenceforth these fellow-travellers never meet again—Charles “went in for the Vol” (the “voluntary examination” preparatory to entering the church), was “japped” (ordained), and took a curacy

in the country—preferring the sacred calling to that of commerce, which his uncle and sole guardian, a rich merchant in the City, had marked out for him. The change these simple proceedings worked with him in a year or two was so extraordinary, that the theory of the apostolic succession might have almost rested on his example. He had become by that time (not, however, that he had been particularly the reverse before) orthodox in belief, pure in morals, an admirer of the landed gentry, a denouncer of the penny press, and a welcome guest in every cottage in his parish where the inmates did not sing psalms upon weekdays.

Maurice Glyn, who, like his friend, was an orphan, but had a few hundred pounds a year of his own, read fiction for the usual period, in a pleader's chambers, and was presently called to the bar; his profession, however, as I have said, was literature. He

had good talents and excellent spirits, the latter of which atoned for him for the former with the literary Bohemians, with whom he was a great favourite; but he did not belong exclusively to their honourable society. On the contrary, he had contributed to the “*Superfine Review*,” until the whim had suddenly seized him to write a novel, which had been a success. Since then, he had given up criticism to his friends, and applied himself entirely to providing them with subjects. His views upon religious matters were vague, if not hazy, and his morals somewhat dependent on circumstances; but he was neither sceptical nor depraved. He had a hatred of injustice more honest than was ever entertained by knight-errant of old; for he had no respect whatever for social position; courteous as well as compassionate to the poor, he was compassionate as well as courteous to women; and true to his friend as steel, he

was bitter and rather unscrupulous against his enemy.

“I am always civil in the first instance ; I never ‘begin’ it,” said he on one occasion, when excusing himself from this last charge ; “and therefore, if a man be rude or pick a quarrel with me, he must be a born beast, and I treat him accordingly.”

There was some truth in what Maurice Glyn said ; but feeling that he was “good company” with most people, he did not understand that the very geniality and frankness which proved his charm with them, might be an impertinence and a reproach in the eyes of others.

The Rev. Charles Milton was very far from being among the outraged minority. He appreciated his friend’s talents to the full ; was well aware, too, in respect of a more important matter, that there was excellent bottom under the mud, and charitably hoped that the mud itself was not very dele-

terious. In a word, Charles had an affectionate admiration for Maurice, and Maurice had an affectionate respect for Charles.

They are sauntering down the fields towards the priory, each with a hand upon the other's shoulder, like two school-friends out upon a holiday, and well they may, for they are still boys at heart.

"Look, there is the ruin, Maurice; that is the Lantern Tower which lifts its head above the trees yonder. It is the only part of the priory visible, until you come close upon it, it is sunk in so deep a dell. How finely the blood-red stone stands out amid the green, does it not?"

"A beautiful and quiet home, indeed," said Maurice, who had a poetic rather than an artistic eye. "Such places must have had great attractions for pensive natures vexed with the rudeness of the times."

"Filled, too, with devout aspirations," urged the curate—"submitting themselves

to that severe Cistercian discipline with eager self-denial—welcoming the hard and narrow bed, the scanty fare”——

“True. But what is that line of ruin across which we stepped without notice?” interrupted Maurice. “I now perceive it surrounds the whole domain.”

“That is the ancient wall which formed the brethren’s deer-park.”

“And what are these two hollows on our left?”

“Those were the fishponds.”

“Good. The cellars were, of course, within the walls. But I cut you short, Charley; welcoming, you were saying, the scanty fare”——

“The deer and fish were for their guests, Maurice; the monks were greatly given to hospitality; but as for their own fare, they ate neither flesh nor fowl, nor eggs, nor even cheese. They had but two meals a day of porridge, and on Fridays only one. Even

that wretched fare they partook of in silence. They never spoke to one another except in the locutory. Each slept in his clothes, and with his girdle on, and rose at midnight to sing the divine offices. They had four services a day, besides matins, vespers, and compline. They lived to God, and not to man, and still less to woman. ‘The sweet, sweet love of daughter, of sister, and of wife,’ was denied to them.”

“My dear Charley,” said Maurice, quietly, “the last prior was reported by the royal commission to have four wives, and his monks an average of two apiece. I read all about it last night in the ‘*Annales Blondelenses*’ (or some such name), which you were so indiscreet as to leave in my bedroom. No, no—

Your saintly monk was fat,
And issuing, shorn and sleek,
Would twist his girdle tight, and pat
The girls upon the cheek ;

and I really can't blame him, if the girls

were like you pretty damsel, who is tripping along to the same goal as ourselves. If I were the prior now, and religiously restricted to four wives, the very next vacancy should be reserved "——

"Don't, Maurice, don't," said the curate, gravely. "I know you mean no harm, but the jest is misplaced. If ever there was a good girl in the world, in the old times or these, it is Mary Grange. Her father is the keeper of the ruins, and she is his only daughter. The holy place loses none of its sanctity by her presence, any more than by the violets that grow in its chancel.—How are you, Mary?"—for the girl and they had met by this time. "This is my old college friend, that I have been expecting this long time, you know—Mr. Glyn."

Maurice lifted his cap, and gazed with undisguised but respectful admiration upon the blushing girl, as she stood with downcast eyes and fingers nervously busy with the

covered basket she carried in her hand. Her slender figure had scarcely attained the grace of womanhood, but her face was divinely fair; its expression pure as a saint's, modest as a fawn's; and the complexion, unkissed by the sun, so exquisitely delicate, that with her drooping head upon its tender stem, she looked a very lily.

“And what have you got in your basket, Mary?” asked the curate.

“Only father's handiwork, sir. His stock at the priory needs replenishing, so he sent me home for these.”

She drew back the coarse but curd-white cloth, and displayed some pretty wooden paper-knives and book-markers.

“How very nicely carved!” exclaimed Maurice. “Why, your father must be quite an artist; and no wonder, since he spends his days in so beautiful a spot.”

“Alas, sir, he is blind,” replied the girl. “He has never seen the place amid which

he dwells, although, to hear him talk, you would never think it. He knows every stick and stone. He cuts these little things, sir, out of the elder-trees that grow in the guest-house."

"Are they for sale?" asked Maurice, eagerly.

"Yes, sir. But if you kindly think of buying, be so good as to buy of father, not of me. It pleases him to sell them, above all things, and he has not many pleasures!"

The three had now reached the ruins. Immediately in front of them rose the great north gateway, with its semicircular Norman arch, and a few mossy stones, which had once been seats beneath a porch. Rude planks, with a doorway cut in them, now filled up the stately entrance, and a rusty chain hung from it, which, at Mary's touch, set a cracked bell in motion within-side.

Scarcely had its tinkling ceased, ere the door opened, and an old man appeared, with

snow-white hair and beard, but upright as a dart : his light-blue eyes had that fixed and stony stare which belongs to the blind alone.

“I expected you before, darling,” said he, fondly. “I am afraid those paper-knives were hard to find : I told you that it was only I who knew where to lay my hand upon them.”

“He thinks he can find everything better than folks with sight,” whispered the girl, softly. “He knew my ring of the bell, you see, sir, though it would sound the same to you as another’s.—Here is Mr. Milton, father, and a friend of his.”

“Yes, Grange,” said the curate, taking the old man’s hand, “I have brought my friend, Maurice Glyn, here, that you may shew him the priory.”

“Very glad to see you, sir,” said the blind man, turning his eager yet patient face towards the visitor. “A fine afternoon, and

weather that is likely to last, although a cloud or two crosses the sun."

It was touching to hear the old gate-keeper talk thus, as though he had no affliction that shut him out alike from sun and cloud; and more touching still to watch his daughter's triumphant look as she marked Glyn's surprise.

"Yes," said Maurice, "I am fortunate in having the sunshine upon the priory; but still more fortunate, as I am assured, in having you for my guide. They tell me you know every stick and stone of the old place."

"And so I ought, sir: who better?" returned the blind man. "I have been here more than thirty years—ten under the Moresby family (all dead and gone now); ten with poor Mr. Irby, as was drowned in Start; and ten with Madam; God bless her!—Please to step in, sir; and mind the doorway, for it's rather low."

Roofless and ruined as was Blondel Priory, perhaps never, in its palmyest days of wealth and power, had it impressed the beholder more with its surpassing beauty. The long transept, in which Maurice Glyn now found himself, was bright with such colours as only Nature herself can use without abuse. The lofty walls, of blood-red sandstone, here jagged against the sky, here pierced for casements that once threw gules and crimson upon the sacred floor, were tapestried with shining leaf and feathery fern; luxuriant foliage strove everywhere to repair the ravages of time; all along the shattered clere-story, in every cranny of broken arch, and in the niches, emptied of their sculptured saints, clustered parasitic flowers; up the ruined bases of the walls, clinging to shaft and pillar, crept wild-roses, exhaling a perfume sweeter beyond compare than any incense censer-swung; the carpet of short grass—a living green—that covered

all below, was gemmed with daisies ; and on the moss-grown tombs of prior and knight, the many-tinted lichen glowed. Above was the blue sky.

The blind man kept a most unguidelike silence ; waiting, as a mother waits to hear the praises of her child, for the admiration which rarely failed to be expressed at the first view of his beloved charge. Mary was watching her father's face, unwilling to miss the gleam of satisfaction it was as sure to shew ; the curate in his turn gazed on her, and when the expected commendation at last was uttered, derived a pleasure not less great than that of the others, at third hand.

Then the old guide began his archæological patter, upon the copyright of which we will not infringe.

They threaded the long nave, where lay many a mouldering knight, their carven images here clasping swords, to shew they had perished in battle ; here, with crossed

legs, to witness they had fought the Saracen; and here again, stretched out at length, with no such good works to boast of, but with devout hands turned upward, trusting to Faith alone. This was a baron of high degree, and patron of the church; and this a spiritual chief, that had erst ruled all the stately place, including the souls of them that dwelt therein: nay, in the once splendid chancel, close by where the high-altar had stood, and sheltered by its very shadow, lay the bones of the high and puissant lord who, “consulting God, and providing for the safety of his own soul,” had “in the name of the Holy Trinity, and in honour of St. Agnes of Blondel,” founded the priory itself. The earl had been dust, and his good sword rust, for nearly a thousand years.

Maurice Glyn, who had a sense of the awful Past more deep than most men, and was studiously averse to shew it, here pulled out his cigar-case.

“You heathen!” exclaimed the curate.

“Nay, Charley; but consider what a time it is since this respectable old nobleman smelt incense.”

They wandered on across the cloisters, and the court within them, with its grave-stones levelled with the earth, that studious monks might walk and read there without stumbling. There were no echoes now, nor would have been from scores of sandalled feet, for all the floor was sunny lawn. The guide and visitor walked first, the curate and Mary following. Suddenly, Maurice stopped, and uttered an ejaculation of surprise.

Turning the corner of a highly decorated porch, an unlooked-for spectacle presented itself. In a large apartment, some small portion of whose groined roof still stood, and one fair pillar, whose fallen capital had been replaced by Nature’s hand with its, perhaps, first type, a honeysuckle, there were seated

on the ground two ladies and a gentleman, eating strawberries and cream. It was too late to retreat, even if the involuntary intruder had been aware (which of course he was not) that the man before him was the object of his friend's dislike.

In another moment, the curate had entered also, and Mrs. and Miss Irby and Mr. Richard Anstey were introduced to Maurice in due form.

“You are just in time for some strawberries, gentlemen,” exclaimed the hospitable old lady.—“You and Mary can go, Grange ; we will shew Mr. Glyn the rest of the priory ourselves.—Pretty place, is it not, sir ? and as I always say, just the very spot for a picnic.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Maurice, taking the proffered seat between his hostess and her daughter. “I conclude that this is the refectory ?”

“I daresay it was,” said the old lady.

Kate Irby, who seemed at least as pleased to see their party of three thus increased as her mother, uttered a silver peal of laughter. "No, no ; it is the chapter-house," said she. "It is here that the old monks sat in solemn conclave, just as the rooks were doing when we disturbed them.—Is it not, Mr. Milton ?"

"Certainly, Miss Kate. Here the novice besought admittance into the order, having asked humbly of the chapter for 'the mercy of God and yours.' The austerities of the place were then explained to him——"

"I accept them," interrupted Maurice, gravely, "and take my strawberries without cream. I feel myself admitted into this pleasant fraternity, I do assure you."

Kate smiled with eye and lip. Mrs. Irby, too, felt that the visitor had somehow said a very civil thing : no woman, however dull, fails to perceive when a man evinces a desire to please.

“Pray, take some sugar, sir,” said she, “if you don’t mind a paper sugar-basin. It’s quite clean, I’ll answer for it.”

“My dear mamma!” ejaculated Kate, reprovingly.

“O yes, Kate; that’s all very well,” retorted the old lady; “but I know what picnics are, and how things are sometimes wrapped up, and I daresay Mr. Glyn does—ham sandwiches in newspapers, and such-like. What *I* say is, let food be as simple as you please, only let it be clean.”

“The old monks were not so particular as you, Madam,” observed Maurice, laughing. “I was reading only last night some very disagreeable details—only my friend here will listen to nothing against it—about the *mixtum* made in this place.”

“Ah, mixture indeed!” exclaimed Mrs. Irby, contemptuously. “Nasty stuff enough, I daresay.—Oh, I know what an admirer Mr. Milton is of your priors and friars; we

often fight about them, we two; but he would not have liked their mode of life in one respect, or else I am much mistaken." And here the old lady nodded and winked with such extreme sagacity, and grew so purple with a consciousness of her own waggery, that it did not need an *Œdipus* to guess that she was alluding to the celibacy of the clergy.

"O yes, Milton is very susceptible," observed Maurice, coolly, but with the secret reflection that not only was the curate right in his remark, that Mrs. Irby was "not a polished person," but also that she was about the most embarrassing old lady, considering the circumstances, he had ever had the fortune to meet. "I am also afraid that he would have been apt to be late at matins, if they took place before nine o'clock."

"Ah, I see you know him well," said Madam, chuckling. "He is a lazy man, is he not?"

There is no shorter method of getting into favour with a certain class of old ladies than by joining with them in a good-natured attack upon some common friend, and Maurice had taken that course designedly. He hoped to be able to put in a good word for the curate with this possible mother-in-law, before he left Blondel Parva.

While he and Mrs. Irby thus rattled on together, the other three had maintained a silence which was becoming oppressive ; but here Richard Anstey rose with a yawn (“You’re a beast,” thought Maurice), and muttering something about going to have a pipe in the Lantern Tower, strolled sullenly away.

“Now, don’t the rest of you young people mind me,” exclaimed the good-natured old lady. “I have brought my netting with me, and shall sit here comfortably enough till you come back.—Would you not like to climb the tower with your cousin, Katie?”

“Not I, mamma ; thank you. I have been there once already to-day, to show the place from which I took the sketch. Besides, he knows we have no dislike to tobacco. I think, by the bye, I saw you throw a cigar away, Mr. Glyn, just now.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Mrs. Irby ; “it was a great pity, for I daresay it cost you threepence or fourpence at the least. My poor husband never gave less, I know.”

“Thank you,” said Maurice, carelessly ; “my cigar was nearly finished.—You spoke of a sketch, Miss Irby ; might I venture to ask to see it ?”

“I am sorry to say it is not here,” answered Kate, with hesitation.

“That don’t matter, child,” said the old lady, kindly.—“Come up to the manor-house, Mr. Glyn, and see it this evening. Come both of you and dine.—What do you say, Mr. Milton ? Another day ? How I hate that phrase !—Well, come to-morrow,

although Richard goes to-night, and there will be no gentleman to do the honours.”

The invitation was accepted at once ; and then the three young people sallied forth, leaving the widow, like a captured black-bird, among the meshes of an unfinished cherry-net.

Maurice thought it very strange that, released from the presence of Kate’s unpropitious mamma, as well as from that of his rival, the curate made no attempt at conversation with his beloved, but suffered him to monopolise her entirely. Nothing loath to do so, still he could not help remarking his friend’s clouded brow and *distrain* air, as well as the want of pertinence in his replies to the questions that were put to him. Presently, the curate dropped behind altogether, and Kate and Maurice wandered over the great ruined fane alone. It was an admirable opportunity for making love, but honourable friendship forbade him

to give way to that temptation, and doubtless the pair got to understand one another more quickly than if they had spent their time in pretty speeches. The place and circumstances had naturally suggested a quotation from the *Princess*, and Maurice found that Kate was, like himself, an attentive student of the sweetest singer of our time: thence they had glanced at the rights and privileges of the sex, contrasting its modern position with that it occupied of old: then their views of social matters were interchanged.

“Could that old life, amid the relics of which they were now straying, have been a happy one?”

Kate thought it could. Independently of devotional feeling, which doubtless actuated many, the poor novice who joined Blondel Priory was no longer the servant of many masters, but of the Church alone: he was certain of a home, of enough, at all events,

for his physical needs. The battle of life—the struggle for necessaries, which in those times, as now, went on unceasingly among our poor—was so far gained. The monks were sure of bed and board, and a roof to cover them.

“You have that horror of poverty which belongs to all delicate and graceful natures, Miss Irby,” returned Maurice; “but I am greatly mistaken if you would not bear it well, should poverty befall you.”

“No,” said she, with a little shudder; “I could not endure it. I would rather die than face what is called penury—want. At the risk of your setting me down as a sadly material personage, Mr. Glyn, I must confess that the not having enough to eat and drink seems to me among the worst misfortunes—far worse than any spiritual troubles, for instance, those religious doubts and difficulties, for involuntarily entertaining which these poor old monks used to scourge them-

selves and wear hair-shirts. I am neither devotee nor philosopher. The worst of poverty is by no means, in my eyes, that it may make one ridiculous ; I should not like the slights, the rubs and snubs, and far less the insolences—— Hark ! what is that ?”

“I heard nothing,” said Maurice, “but the cawing of the rooks.—Pray, go on with what you were saying.”

“Well, in a word, I should not like to be otherwise than what I am, a lady—I mean what the world calls a lady, for to have expensive tastes, without the means of gratifying them, education without the surroundings of refinement (like Mary Grange, the guide’s daughter here, a girl that knows twice as much as I do, thinks twice as deeply, feels twice as sensitively, yet lives in a hovel, and is glad of broken victuals), that would be terrible ! No ; I must have two gowns (and more), and everything handsome about me, like Dogberry.”

“What! carriages and horses?” cried Maurice, thinking of his friend the curate. “It may make some poor man’s heart ache, one day, to hear you confess as much.”

“No, no,” laughed Kate; “I am not so bad as that. Wealth does not dazzle me.” Here she spoke more gravely, with the remembrance, perhaps, of what had taken place that morning in her mind. “If I love comfort, I do not covet splendour—— Hark! there is that scream again; I was sure I heard it.”

This time, Maurice also caught what seemed indeed like a woman’s cry for help; some broken steps beside him led to a tottering wall, from which half the ruin could be seen, and he sprang up there on the instant.

“What is the matter, Mr. Glyn? What is it that you see? Pray, tell me.”

For a few moments, he did not answer; then: “Nothing, nothing whatever,” said he; but yet he did not quit his post.

“You are not deceiving me, I trust, sir,” cried Kate, piteously. “Is my mother safe? Look to the chapter-house—the roof——”

“The roof—what is left of it at least—is just where it has been for eight hundred years or so, and your mother is working away, like Penelope at her web. There are some people playing at hide-and-seek in the nave.”

“Oh, I daresay, excursionists,” exclaimed Miss Irby, pettishly. “I hope they have enjoyed themselves, for they have destroyed my pleasure for the day.—Let us go back to my mother, Mr. Glyn.”

Kate looked so pale that Maurice did not attempt to dissuade her, and besides, he perceived that she was not quite satisfied with his report. They found the old lady sitting just where they left her.

“What have you done with Mr. Milton?” cried she; “and where is Richard?”

“I know nothing of them, mamma; but

I have had such a fright about *you*—it was only some stupid people playing at hide-and-seek in the nave—but I thought I heard you scream.”

“Silly child!” answered the old lady; “I ain’t afraid of frogs; see, I’ve caught two in my net, poor little things. It’s getting damp—that’s what brings them out—and I am glad you came, because of my rheumatics.—In the absence of these truants, Mr. Glyn, perhaps you will escort us home?”

To this request, Maurice of course acceded; albeit he was very curious to see his friend, and receive an explanation of the scene he had witnessed from the summit of the abbey-wall. What he had described to Miss Irby as “Nothing, nothing whatever,” had indeed been a very interesting spectacle; no less than that of Mr. Richard Anstey, magistrate for the county, lying upon the grassy floor of the south transept, and the

Rev. Charles Milton, M.A., standing over him, with one hand clenched, and his right foot planted (apparently with emphasis) upon that prostrate gentleman's white waist-coat.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

EVENING had fallen upon Blondel Priory, touching its blood-red summits with a deeper glow, and leaving its quiet chambers yet more still. Nothing in that secluded dell—the casket of one of Time’s fairest jewels—is now heard, save the unceasing song of the pebbly brook, which had for centuries laved its western wall—unceasing, and yet so various ; for had it not spoken of something different to all human ears that had cared to listen to it, for unnumbered generations ! To the swineherd, before one sacred stone there was laid upon another, of some fair serf-girl, who should be his comfort yet, notwithstanding his scanty dole and many stripes ; to the noble founder, of

condonation or forgiveness for many a passionate and tyrannous deed ; to the monks, let us hope, as its clear waters hurried to the neighbouring sea, of that Eternity to which their own pure lives were as surely tending. While walls decayed and creeds outwore themselves, it had still flowed on, continuous accompaniment to all human thoughts and hopes : lover and mourner, pleasure-seeker and student, had still been soothed or saddened by its gentle strain, had seen in its lucent mirror the wavering image of their future, or the more steadfast presentment of their past.

There is one standing by it now, listening and gazing, like the rest : an old man, to judge by his thin gray hairs and broken looks, and a poor one certainly. He is in rags ; his shoes are gaping so that they show his stockingless and blistered feet, and, perhaps to cool them, instead of using the little wooden bridge, he presently steps into

the stream, and wades across. So still it is that the splash of every footfall wakes a slumberous echo in the ruined fane. He approaches the door and listens, then pulls the bell, which clangs and creaks unanswered.

“Grange has gone home, and for all I know, to his long home,” muttered the old man. “I will try his cottage, or what used to be his cottage, for meat and drink I must have. As for sleeping, I can come back and sleep here; I daresay the roof still holds above the chapter-house; and whether it does or not, is the same to me. Even if it rain, that will not spoil my clothes.” He spoke with bitterness, and the expression of his face was hard and scornful; but presently, as he stood still and listened, it grew milder.

“Why should I be angry?” murmured he. “I am come here for my pleasure, the only pleasure—God help me!—I have had

for many a year. If it is selfish so to do, it is scarcely sinful, as my old pleasures were. I will run no risk; there shall not be the least imprudence; but I must see my Katie's face before I die. It is not much to ask of her in return for—— Bah! it is no use trying to deceive one's self; I am a rogue, let me look at myself from which side I will." He sat down on one of the moss-grown steps outside the door, and fell a-musing. "She must be twenty now, and beautiful—I will answer for it—though they did use to say she was growing like her father. I should no more know her than she would know me. The last time we were together, I carried her across this very stream: how she laughed, and chatted, and covered my face with her sweet kisses. Alas, alas!" He hid his face in his large sunburned palms, and groaned aloud; then sweeping one across his eyes, resumed: "We had a picnic here that day—my fare-

well to champagne for ever. Thanks to it, my spirits were excellent. Nobody guessed that I was worse than a beggar by five thousand pounds of honest debt, and thrice that money owed to sharpers. What a frightful fool was I to bring myself to such a pass! How *could* I do it? And yet it was not all my fault: no, not all mine. That cursed Sir Nicholas! The thief, the traitor! I have sold many men, myself; overreached them, lied to them (*cheated* them, some would say), but my *friend*, never! The dirty villain! Then, when we broke, to punish me through my poor darling Katie! To burn his will!" Here some remembrance seemed to tickle the old man, and he uttered a low chuckling laugh. "Well, that's over, I suppose. He has made another long since, I do not doubt. I wonder who is heir? Most likely, his nephew Richard: a bad lot by this time, I guess, if at least the boy is father to the

man. He must be nearing middle age. How strange it seems—to be in the world, and yet not of it!—to mark how it wags on when a man is dead, as though he had never lived.—Ah, but these wet rags strike cold! Well, that will help to shorten matters, perhaps. I have gone through what would have killed other men thrice over, during these last years, but the iron frame begins to creak at last; and I would it were in pieces.” Here he rose, and slowly climbed the footpath towards the village, pausing once at the gap in the old deer-park wall to mutter: “Susan, I will not see; there would be risk in that—but only Katie.”

CHAPTER V.

THE BLIND MAN AT HOME.

WHEN the gate-keeper and his daughter left the ruins at the usual hour for closing, and after the visitors had departed in a different order from that in which they came—first Richard Anstey; then Maurice, with the two ladies; and lastly the curate—there were traces of recent sorrow on Mary's face. Her voice was studiously cheerful; but her movements, less agile and childlike than customary, had already caused her father to inquire what ailed her. He had kissed her cheek, but she had made haste to dry the tear that lay there, and even his instinct failed to inform him of her red eyes and downcast look. It was not the first time that Madam's cousin—the nearest

relative of the family to whom she and her father owed their bread—had offered her a rudeness. He had persecuted the poor girl with his unwelcome attentions with a persistence possible only to a clown by nature, with a heart of stone. His pretensions to the hand of Miss Kate Irby interposed no obstacle; his views were liberal, and his tastes catholic, as respected women; even the propinquity of the lawful object of his affections made, as we have seen, no sort of difference with him, any more than with the stage-gallant, who does not hesitate to flirt with his mistress's maid, almost under the lady's very eyes.

Mr. Richard Anstey honestly believed that the daughters of the lower classes were created for his pleasure, and even that his condescension could not be otherwise than gratifying to its objects, however appearances might seem to point the other way. It is not uncommon with gentlemen in his position to

labour under the same mistake. Delicately sensitive to the least rudeness offered to their own female relatives, and microscopically careful of their reputation for courage, their behaviour with respect to young women in social grades below their own is habitually base and cowardly. Nor is it so easy as it may seem for their victims to resent such persecutions. To conceal their occurrence, which a modest girl is naturally inclined to do, is of course to encourage repetition; to publish it, is not only certain to draw down upon her the most unpleasant animadversions—especially from those of her own sex and station—but may be productive of the most distressing consequences.

In Mary's case, for instance, she was aware that Mr. Anstey aspired to Miss Irby's hand, and for all that she knew, that young lady—whose mother owned the priory, as well as their little cottage, and to

whom they were under many obligations—was not unwilling to bestow it on him. To complain that Mr. Richard had chucked her under the chin, and tried to kiss her, would have been to break off the match upon which Mrs. Irby, at all events, was known to have set her heart. Still more did she dread the effect of such intelligence upon her blind father: it would have gone well nigh to kill him to hear that his Mary was subject to such rudenesses. So she had borne with them without complaint, only shewing, unmistakably, as she imagined, to their inflieter the contempt and abhorrence with which they inspired her. Richard Anstey, not perceiving, let us hope, how helplessly she was tied and bound, had taken enforced silence for something like consent to his attentions, and had pursued them with more and more of impudence, until that occasion we have described, when he found himself confronted by the church

militant, and prostrated by the secular arm. His conduct towards this innocent lamb had not gone unnoticed by the lynx-eyed shepherd of the Blondel Parva flock. Some trivial circumstance had long ago awakened the curate's suspicion; his sacred calling of course more than justified interference, and he had gone to Mrs. Irby, and stated very temperately (and putting a great restraint upon himself in doing so) the nature of his misgivings. Perhaps too temperately. That lady had treated the matter lightly. The curate, she averred, was mistaken; or, at most, she was sure that Richard meant nothing more than a harmless flirtation. It would be most injudicious to treat such an affair gravely, or even to mention it at all; nay, she begged, as a particular favour to herself, that no stir should be made about it.

After this, the Rev. Charles Milton resolved to act upon his own responsibility,

and no wolf was ever watched by sheep-dog more vigilantly than Richard Anstey was watched by him. His ecclesiastical training had in no way chilled his blood, nor hindered it, on sufficient occasion, from rising to boiling-heat at the shortest notice ; and the occasion had arisen, as has been hinted, in the ruins of Blondel Priory. In his college-days he had not been without distinction for hitting out straight from the shoulder, and never at refractory bargee upon reedy Cam had he struck a blow more potent (or, it must be confessed, one which gave him a tenth of the pleasure) than that which took Mr. Richard Anstey exactly between the eyes, and levelled him with the grassy floor.

Richard had picked himself up as soon as he was permitted to do so, and pressing his handkerchief to his face, had quitted the priory without a word. Maurice had found him at the manor-house, looking rather pale,

but perfectly composed, and accounting for his having left the party by the statement (not far from fact) that he had been seized with a sudden and violent attack of bleeding at the nose. The curate had looked about for his friend, and discovering his departure, had gone home, not displeased to find himself at leisure to reflect alone upon what had happened, although he had already resolved, for the young girl's sake, to say nothing of the matter, unless Mr. Anstey should compel him to do so.

“You will not be troubled any more, I hope, Mary,” was what he had said to the gate-keeper's daughter, as he left the ruins. But Mary answered nothing. It is very embarrassing for a young female parishioner to thank her spiritual pastor for knocking down the lover of her young mistress (for such in fact Kate was), and indeed the curate himself was not so perfectly satisfied with the achievement when his blood began

to cool. The poor girl shed many a bitter tear, for she felt that the trouble might not be over, but far otherwise. Moreover, she felt shame, almost as scathing as though she had earned it by some misconduct of her own. Kate had not spoken beyond the truth when she said that the gate-keeper's daughter was more sensitive than herself. The pride of kings, as that of all other folks which springs from mere social elevation, may be humbled ; power and its sycophants, wealth and its parasites, all the appliances of state and luxury, may be suddenly snatched away, and leave their late possessor eclipsed and abject ; and yet there need not be felt one pang of shame. But intelligence crushed under the heel of ignorant force, virtue outraged by brutal vice, these writhe and wince, tormented to the quick. There is no pride that suffers from slight or fall as theirs does. For once, it almost seemed well to Mary Grange that she had a blind man for her

father: she felt thankful to be able to conceal from him her burning cheeks, her dewy eyes, the shame and grief that were stamped, she knew, upon her every feature, as they sat together at home that eventful evening, and conversed as usual.

Though very small, their cottage, set on the outskirts of a coppice that crowned the hill above the priory, was both comfortable and picturesque. It had a gay fringe of garden, and a pretty porch, scarcely less brilliant with sweet-scented creepers; while within, it was not only scrupulously clean, but furnished in a manner much superior to dwellings of its class. A charming water-colour picture of the ruins, executed by Kate herself, hung over the chimney-piece; and rows of neatly-arranged books—the modest bindings of which evidenced much use—lined the white walls. Flowers, too, were almost as numerous within as without; all chosen by Mary for their odour,

not for beauty, since fragrance was their only attribute which her father could enjoy.

The gate-keeper was curious about new people; and it was often his daughter's nightly task to describe to him the personal appearance of those who had visited the priory during the day.

It was most disagreeable to Mary that she had to supply, on this particular occasion, a categorical description of the very man whose hateful image she was endeavouring to banish from her thoughts; but so it happened. Richard Anstey had stayed at Blondel Parva years ago, when he was a mere lad, and the gate-keeper had been not unacquainted with him; but during his present visit, the young man had not chanced to visit the ruins before that afternoon; he had met Mary elsewhere, mostly in the coppice that lay between the cottage and the village: ecclesiastical edifices of all

sorts, whether in repair or decay, were altogether out of his line.

“What sort of man has Mr. Richard grown to, Mary?” inquired the blind man.

“He is tall, and strongly-built, and he has good features, father.”

“But not good looks, eh? So I thought, child.”

“Nay, father; I daresay some folks might think him very good-looking.”

“His voice is not improved,” mused the blind man; “it is harsh and tyrannical. I trust, Mary, he will never become our master.”

Mary shuddered, and all her wan face cried “Amen!” but she did not trust herself to speak.

“Do you think that Miss Kate really loves him?” pursued the blind man meditatively; “or is it only Madam who wishes her to do so?”

“ I do not know, father. I have scarcely even seen them together except at church.”

“ And I never, save to-day, child. Yet one can make a guess. I have heard her speak of him oftentimes, and even that tells something.”

“ That is so like you, dear father :” she laid her taper fingers on the old man’s hand with a playful and affectionate grace. “ I was telling Mr. Milton only this very day how much more you think you see than other folks ; and we agreed that you were growing very conceited.”

“ Ah, the curate !” murmured the blind man : the rayless eyes looked, as usual, straight before them ; but the head here turned aside with the expectant ear ready to catch the slightest modulation in his daughter’s tone. “ So you were having a talk with the curate to-day, were you, Mary ? ”

“ Yes, father : at least, that is ”—she

blushed and hesitated—"he and his friend met me as I was returning to the priory, and we walked together a little way."

"Just so. And the friend, this Mr. Glyn—he that bought half my stock in trade—that young man with the good heart (so much, I know)—what is *he* like, child?"

"He has a sharp, thin face, father, oval as Miss Kate's, and his eyes are even softer than hers; but he is very dark. His features are good enough; yet it is his expression which strikes you most; so frank, so intelligent. I think, as you say, that he must have a good heart."

"So my Mary has fallen in love with the curate's friend, eh?" said the blind man, smiling. "Come, tell me the truth. He is very handsome."

"No, father, I cannot say that."

"Well, as handsome as the curate. Come."

Rose-red the lily turned from chin to

brow, and the delicate ears grew pink as the lips of the murmuring sea-shell. "Yes," said she, "handsomer than he."

"Indeed! And handsomer than Mr. Richard?"

"Much, father."

"Then Miss Kate may yet make a better choice; and, as far as a blind man may judge—— Who knocks? Who is that at the door, child?"

Pale as a sheet, the girl tottered to the window, and looked forth. Her heart beat fast with the dread of seeing that hated face of which her father had just spoken on the other side of the pane. But her alarm was groundless. "It is an old beggar-man," said she; "he looks very wan and wretched, but not harmful."

"Let him in, child, and give him of what we have. I am old myself, and may be a beggar yet, for aught I know."

CHAPTER VI.

SUPPER AND LODGING.

“God bless you, pretty damsel, for opening your door to a poor wretch like me,” said the incomer in the whining tone peculiar to the professional mendicant. “Most people shoot their bolts against such as I am, after nightfall.”

“We are not afraid of any evil-doers here in Blondel,” observed the gate-keeper sturdily ; “and although I be a blind man, I can use my staff upon occasion.—Sit down, fellow, and if you can eat bread and cheese, with new milk to wash them down, you shall have them.—Where do you come from and whither are you going ?”

“I thank you for your hospitality ; but as for your questions, they are easier asked

than answered," returned the beggar grimly. "Like Satan, I come from going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down in it."

"Like Satan, too, it seems you can quote Scripture," rejoined the other gravely; "though holy writ is not for heedless use.—Are you in search of work?"

"Work!" echoed the beggar scornfully. "Ask your fair daughter, blind man, whether I look like a worker.—Tell him what you see, girl, without fear of wounding my feelings. A ragged wretch, old and broken, such as no farmer would look at twice, in haytime or harvest, unless it were to set his dog at him. Is it not so?"

"He looks ill, and worn, and old," said Mary, thus appealed to.

"Ay, and famished with hunger, save for these last five minutes. You say right, girl.—I drink your good health in milk, Mr. Gate-keeper—and yours, pretty lass—since

malt liquor seems to be scarce in these parts."

"I am sorry we have no beer," observed Mary simply ; " but you need not spare the milk. Madam is so good as to let us have a cow entirely for our own use ; and when cream and milk are not much wanted for picnic parties at the priory—which is the case at present—we have more than we need."

" And who is this Madam who is so good to you ?" inquired the stranger carelessly, and proceeding with his repast like one who has not had his fill for many a day.

" Mrs. Irby of the manor-house : she owns the ruins and all about here ; and a better mistress is not to be found."

" Ah ! She is a widow, I conclude, since you don't speak of her husband."

" Yes. Mr. Irby, poor man, was drowned years and years ago."

" And she has children, I reckon ; for that mostly makes people tender-hearted."

“She has one daughter.”

“Good. I like manor-houses without a master, and where there is a young lady. It is at such places—next to the cottages of charitable poor folks like yourselves—that we beggars get most given to us. Is the young lady kind as she is beautiful? You did not say she *was* beautiful, I know, but that is our professional way of talking. ‘Good lady, be kynd as you are beautiful; and, for the love of Heaven (or of the Blessed Virgin, if we are in Ireland), give us a copper;’ notwithstanding that she may be as old and ugly as the devil.”

There was a savage irony in the old man’s tone which strongly contrasted with his former lachrymose style, though the gate-keeper did not seem to mark it: always apprehensive for the future, and perhaps reminded by the mendicant’s talk of the penury which might one day be his own, the blind man sat with unchanging, though not inatten-

tive face, and kept silence without sign. Mary, on the other hand, resented the speaker's words with something like indignation.

“Miss Kate Irby does not happen, however, to be either old or ugly, but the reverse of both,” said she; “and she is very kind-hearted also, although, it is true, not easily imposed upon.”

“Don't be angry, pretty lass,” returned the beggar, smiling; “I had no intention to offend in what I said. I shall not impose upon your young lady, I promise you, unless to ask for sixpence is an imposition. It is part of our trade to gather all the information we can respecting those whom we intend to honour with a call.”

“Is that how you found out I was the gate-keeper?” inquired the blind man, breaking silence after a long interval.

“Of course it was, good sir. And now, in your turn, I have got your daughter here, to tell me something of these Kirbies—or

Irbies, is it?—which may get me a meal and a shilling to-morrow up at the great house. Poor people should always help one another, although, indeed, I should not say that *here*; first, because you have already treated me so well; and secondly, because I have no right to place you in the same category with a poor devil like myself.”

“Category is a long word for a beggarman to use so glibly,” observed the blind man quietly, looking a very Dionysius’ chamber—all ear.

“Ah, now that tells me, that you have never been on the tramp yourself,” returned the mendicant coolly. “Scripture and long words are the very commodities we deal in, and our correspondence, in particular, is chokefull of texts and quotations.—But talking of these Kirbies or Irbies, my pretty damsel, is this young lady grown up? If so, being such as you describe her, she ought to have a suitor, if not half-a-dozen.”

“It is not for me to talk to a stranger about Miss Kate’s affairs,” returned Mary stiffly; “but anybody in the village will tell you this much, that her cousin, Mr. Richard Anstey, wishes to marry her.”

“Oh, indeed,” said the mendicant carelessly. “There was a gentleman of that name in Sussex, not very far from here: Anstey Court he lived at, and he was a baronet. I have had good victuals given to me in that house years ago.”

“That is Sir Nicholas Anstey, this young gentleman’s uncle,” said Mary. “He is now dangerously ill; I heard Madam say this evening that Mr. Richard had to go to Swinlake by the mail-train to-night in consequence.”

“I suppose, then, he expects to be heir, eh? Just as in foreign parts where I have been, the vulture comes flapping from the sky to attend the dying—that is, for the pickings.”

“Let us hope that this man goes not only for *them*,” answered Mary reprovingly, unwilling to seem to approve, by silence, of so harsh a speech, though uttered against one whom she had so little cause to defend.

“Let us hope so, by all means,” replied the beggar cynically. “I have never known any harm come of hopings, although much of expectations.”

There was an embarrassing silence. The stranger’s mocking tone froze Mary dumb ; she seemed to perceive in him a wicked man, whom deserved penury and crosses had only hardened and embittered.

“You spoke just now of foreign parts,” observed the gate-keeper suddenly ; “have you travelled much abroad ?”

“Yes. When I told you I was a wanderer on the earth, I might have added, and on the seas also. You have heard of Citizens of the World ; well, I am one of those, except that I have scarcely possessed

the rights of citizenship. I am a Vagabond of the World : like Cain, you may say, perhaps, only I never had a younger brother ; nor, what is worse, and offers much greater temptation to fratricide, an elder one. Yes, man, I have travelled far, both east and west ; and that reminds me that I have come a long day's march—half the way from town—since morning, and my old bones are weary. Is there any shelter that I can creep into for to-night ?”

In the little cottage, there was no room, absolutely none, where this man could be put. The farmers about Blondel, as Mary was well aware, most strongly objected to any tramp sleeping in their barns ; and yet she did not venture to utter the words : “ There is the workhouse.” There was about their visitor, abject and homeless though he confessed himself to be, a certain grotesque but genuine dignity which forbade it.

There ensued a pause more awkward than any which had preceded it. Why did not her father—generally by no means scant of speech—explain how matters stood? She was on the point of framing an excuse for their apparent want of hospitality, when the stranger himself relieved her from embarrassment.

“I know you cannot take me in here, Mr. Gate-keeper; but you could let me sleep in the priory, could you not? There are no silver candlesticks, nor any communion-plate there, I reckon, nor—so far as I could see as I came along—so much as a morsel of painted glass to tempt a poor fellow. Even if I was one of those gentry who strip the lead off roofs, I should do no harm there. Come, I only ask for bare walls and a bed of grass.”

Notwithstanding her prejudice against him, Mary could not but pity this poor houseless wretch, thus humbly pleading for

so small a boon, and the more so since she was well convinced that it would not be granted. No verger of St. George's Chapel could have regarded that splendid fane with a greater reverence than the gate-keeper paid to his own ruined charge; and she knew that a man might just as well have asked permission of the former official to occupy for the night one of the stalls of the Knights of the Garter, as have made that request to her father which she had just heard.

What was her surprise, then, when the latter answered, in a grave slow voice: "The accommodation you demand is certainly not good, yet it is better than you think for. There is a small room which Madam has had roofed in for us, just within the gateway, as a shelter in wet weather, and you can sleep there, if you will."

Here the blind man rose, and took down the giant key that hung beside the chimney-piece.

“I will show you the place myself,” continued he.—“You need not come with us, child. I shall be back soon.”

The young girl, accustomed to obedience, expressed no astonishment; but returning the stranger’s grateful farewell, opened the cottage-door for the departing pair. She watched them, through the gathering gloom, wind down the narrow path towards the ruins—the blind leading the seeing—and cross the little bridge; then they were hid from sight.

Who *could* he be, this beggar-man, who had thus persuaded her father to grant so unparalleled and distasteful a request?

So long did she wait for the blind man’s return, that she began to grow uneasy, notwithstanding that he was well accustomed to go out alone. She had even thrown her shawl round her shoulders, in order to go forth, when his familiar step at last was heard.

“What a long time you have been, father ! I almost began to get nervous about you, alone with that strange man.”

“Silly child,” said he tenderly ; “who would hurt a blind man ? The poor fellow’s clothes were wet, so we had to light a fire : that is what detained me.”

“Light a fire !” thought Mary. “Why, he will not suffer even the quality who come a-gipsying to boil a kettle within the priory walls, unless by Madam’s special license !” She could scarcely believe her ears.

What with thinking of what had happened that afternoon concerning herself, as well as upon this late occurrence, Mary by no means fell asleep that night, as was her wont, almost as soon as her dainty head touched the coarse pillow. Hence it was that she slept later than usual. When she rose, her father was already up and out. Presently, she saw him returning, as if from the ruins, with an empty cup and platter, which she

watched him carefully wash and put away in their places. It was evident that he had been to take their guest of the previous night his breakfast, but did not wish it to be known. It was no sin to humour a blind man's wishes, and Mary made no remark upon the subject. When her father and herself went down to the ruins, at their usual hour, the stranger—the first who had used the guest-chamber there, doubtless, for more than three hundred years—had gone his way.

The whole affair seemed to Mary like a curious dream—one of those weird ones which are not dreamed and done with, but recur. Involuntarily, she asked herself: Should she not, one day, see that poverty-stricken, but caustic and astute old man again? And something within her, equally independent of her own will, seemed to answer: "Yes, for certain."

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE COURT-GATES.

WHEN Richard Anstey left Blondel Parva for his uncle's on the same evening which introduced Maurice to the manor-house, he was in by no means an enviable state of mind. It is not pleasant to be knocked down by anybody, but to suffer that indignity at the hands of a clergyman is especially objectionable, since—unless in the very exceptional case of one's being secretary to a Sheffield Union—you cannot take your revenge. Richard could not call his enemy out, or, what was the same thing, Mr. Milton could not come if he did; nor could he, under the circumstances, bring an action against him, with much chance of getting damages: nor could he (and of this he felt

most satisfied of all) inflict condign punishment upon him—that is, punch his head. But if hate could have killed a man, such a good hater was Richard Anstey, that the Rev. Charles Milton would have been dead already, even though, instead of being curate, he were in occupation of the best living of his college, and endowed with the corresponding powers of vitality.

Again, although the suspicion of rivalry had scarcely had time to dawn, Mr. Anstey did not like the notion of leaving Maurice Glyn—"Just one of those finicking fellows that take so with women"—with his footing within Blondel Manor already secured.

Again, Mr. Richard's nose was tender, and hurt him a good deal with its nervous twitching. He owed a debt, which was not of gratitude, for that, to "that hypocritical little prude, the gate-keeper's daughter, confound her!" He was no longer indifferent to her disgrace. His wicked fancy for the

poor girl, though keen as ever, began to be mingled with a desire for her humiliation. She possessed the power of doing him a great injury. Suppose, corroborated by the curate, she were to publish what had really happened ! His chance with Kate (he understood her well enough to feel) would then be over. He was really enamoured of his cousin, as deeply as his natural selfishness would permit him to be ; and, besides, it might be of great importance to him, in a pecuniary way, to make her his wife. He had spoken truth when he said his uncle might have made any number of wills since that by which he had made him his sole heir ; and the old man had always had a liking for his godchild, strongest, too, at those rare times when his better nature asserted itself ; and now that he was sick, and perhaps dying, there was no knowing to what sentimental nonsense he might not give way.

Such were the unsatisfactory reflections in which the young man indulged, both on the way to the station, as he sat silent on the dog-cart, with his cigar clenched tightly between his teeth, and also during his brief railway journey. It was but five-and-thirty miles by road and rail from Blondel Parva to Swinlake, the village where his uncle's house was situated ; but when he arrived there it was too late to go up to the Court that night. It was by no means open to him, as his uncle's nearest relative, to come thither or go thence as he pleased. At no time had he ventured to do this, for reasons that will presently appear, but least of all, at a critical period such as the present. If the baronet was not so ill as his informant had described, or if he had got better in the meantime, it was probable that he would take great offence at so untimely a visit. Folks in his position are commonly extremely jealous of their heirs (especially if,

as in this case, they are not their personal favourites), and resent above all things the being believed to be near their end. The beggar's remark about the vulture would have occurred to Sir Nicholas at once, had his nephew made his uninvited appearance, with kind inquiries, at 11.30 P.M., and that young gentleman was much too sagacious to do so. He resolved to take up his quarters for the night at the village inn.

The *Anstey Arms* was not by any means an early-closing house; the landlord, Mr. James Hoskins, secure in the good will of his patron—earned years ago, it was whispered, in ways too disreputable as well as too numerous to mention—did not trouble himself much about the law in that matter; and besides, Mr. Richard was expected. It was Jem Hoskins who had given him warning by letter of his uncle's precarious condition, and it was Jem himself who drove the spring-cart—the only vehicle which his

slender establishment possessed—which met him at the Swinlake Station.

“I am deuced glad to see you, Mr. Richard,” observed this worthy, confidentially, as the young man seated himself by his side. “Your uncle was took main bad to-day again. He’ll slip his wind this time, as sure as eggs.”

“Does the doctor say that, or is it only your own muddle-headed notion?” returned the other, in an irritable tone. “I shan’t thank you, Mr. Hoskins—I can tell you *that*—if you have brought me here on a fool’s errand, when I was much better engaged.”

“Oh, you *are* engaged, Mr. Richard, are you?” inquired the landlord, waggishly. “Well it’s a good thing to have made sure of Miss Kate, at all events.” Then, perceiving that his companion received this pleasantry with a face like a thunder-cloud, he added with gravity : “The doctor has said

nothing, sir, because he knows better than to do so ; but, for all that, Sir Nicholas is a dying man. A young man, too, as one may say—not five years older than me : it is enough to make one quake for fear one’s-self. Lord, Lord, I remember him a younger one than yourself, Mr. Richard ; and a deal more gamesome.”

“How do you know he is dying ?” inquired the impatient heir.

“Well, Mr. Richard, I *do* know it, although I have not heard it said in words. Her Ladyship knows it well enough, I can see, though I should not like to be the man to tell her so. I saw her this very afternoon. Everything goes on as usual up at the Court, and there is even company there. Mr. Charles has a friend there, and so has Mr. Leonard.”

Richard muttered a savage oath, and struck his foot with violence against the splash-board.

“There, there, sir; don’t frighten the old mare. All that is coming to an end now,” continued the landlord, soothingly. “The whole Noah’s Ark of them will have to clear out, and you will be where you ought to be at last. Only, it is just as well you should see to things yourself, and that’s why I wrote. That old harpy—what Sir Nicholas can have seen in her for so many years, nobody knows: she is as thin as the whipping-post she ought to be tied to, and yellow as the guinea which she ought to be cut off with; yes, sir, she is black and yellow (Sir Nicholas’s racing colours, that’s one thing), like an old crow, and dresses like a scarecrow, and yet what airs she gives herself!—that old harpy, as I was saying, may not be satisfied even with the slice she has got; and the young ones—hers and the others—have, I daresay, each got their bills open crying: ‘More, more!’ although their crops should be full enough. I am pretty

sure there's mischief brewing, her Ladyship looked so haggard and anxious—which, why should she do, considering what has been secured to her, unless she were greedy for more? But the fact is, she has no conscience, and——”

“The devil take her!” interrupted Richard, violently. “Why do you harp upon her, when you know it annoys me?”

“Well, you don't hate her worse than I do, Mr. Richard,” replied the other coolly. “To hear her give her ‘orders,’ forsooth, and lord it over those who were hand and glove with Sir Nicholas when she was a mere baby, makes me near to mad. Then to think of such a one as she affecting religion, or at all events, philanthropy (which is almost as bad), and being good to the poor (with your money, as it were, which, I hope will be better spent some day)—it's absolutely sickening. Interfering, too, in the parish (she could not do worse if she

was a parson's wife), and protecting people (as she calls it) agin their masters and betters——”

“That'll do, Mr. Hoskins,” interrupted the young man impatiently. “I tell you I won't hear her spoken of. I know well enough why you are so bitter against the woman; but what's that to my wrong? She spoilt some little game of yours on one occasion, did she not?—would not permit you to take advantage of unprotected innocence, eh?”

“Innocence be damned!” muttered the landlord sullenly.

“Well, let us hope, for your sake, it will be so, and not *vice versâ*, as is generally supposed,” returned the other coolly. “But that reminds me; has Sir Nicholas sent for the parson?”

“Not he, Mr. Richard; he hates parsons, as he does lawyers, like pison; neither of them has been at the Court these many

years. No, he has not sent for the parson ; fortunately, he is a deal too game for that."

" Why fortunately, Mr. Hoskins ? "

" Did I say fortunately ? " inquired the other with a look of stolidity.

" Yes, and you meant it. You think that, in a moment of weakness, or perhaps of terror, my uncle might confess to the parson a thing or two which would implicate a certain parishioner of his, who shall be nameless, but who is not in very good odour with the bench of magistrates already. Yes, it is fortunate for you that no parson has been sent for."

" That may be, or it may not," answered the other, with a sneer in his turn : " at all events, it is fortunate for somebody else that the rector has had no chance of putting a spoke in his wheel. If your uncle should ask advice about his worldly affairs, as well as t'other, your character don't stand over-well with the clergy, I believe ; and every-

body pities Miss Kate Irby, the nearest relative to Sir Nicholas, except yourself, and who lost so great a chance twelve years ago."

The worthy pair now kept silence, each chewing his cud of bitter thought, till presently, on turning a corner of the road, the little inn came into view. "Come," resumed the landlord, "I didn't go for to make you angry, Mr. Richard, and shouldn't ha' done it, but that you began girding at me. Them as lives in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. However, there's no need for us to quarrel; we are both in the same boat in this matter, although I pull such a little oar, and you such a large one; and that's all the more reason why we should pull each other *round*."

Mr. Richard Anstey was by no means in a humour to appreciate this stroke of fancy—his nature was morose, and altogether antagonistic to that of the jovial old sinner by whose side he sat—but he was understood

to ask: "Who the blank wanted to quarrel?" in a tone which, if not exactly apologetic, was as near to it as it was necessary for a person of his superior position to go.

Though reconciliation had thus been made, Mr. James Hoskins—not altogether unused to deal with fellow-creatures who require delicate handling—had the tact to perceive that he had furnished all the information required of him, and that his further companionship was not desired. Accordingly, after setting forth some supper with his own hands, he left his future patron alone in the little private sitting-room of his establishment; it looked out immediately upon the gates of the park, and from it the lights in the sick man's residence could easily be seen glimmering above the tree-tops of the long avenue. The adjoining bedchamber was not made use of by Mr. Richard. All night long he sat at the open window, smoking cigar after cigar, first picturing to himself

the view he knew so well, and when the moon rose, and displayed it, gazing upon sward and timber, tower and turret, with greedy and far-reaching eyes. The proximity of the prize he coveted had altered the character of his meditations, but they were still far from being pleasant ones.

Anstey Court was indeed a stately place, statelier even than befitted the rent-roll of its present tenant, and how was the heir to keep it up upon an income so greatly diminished as he well knew, under the most favourable circumstances, it was sure to be? The woman Hoskins had called "her Ladyship" (although with no legal right to that title), and her little son would rob him, nay, had already robbed him, of many a fair acre. Charles and Leonard, too, bastards both, though by different mothers, had had their share. Sir Nicholas had been careful amply to provide beforehand for his own flesh and blood, and trusted nothing to the generosity

of his lawful heir. Was it possible that these hateful persons were plotting still further against him (Richard), or were they merely living in clover yonder as long as the old man was master, content to retire, each with his proper spoil, at his decease? That was one suspicion that troubled Mr. Richard. Another source of anxiety was Kate Irby. Had any softening influences been at work since he had seen his uncle last (many months ago), to induce him to remember her in his will more largely? Suppose some remorse, for instance, had caused him to bequeath to her those ten thousand pounds he had won so cunningly of her dead father, and which Kate had spoken of as her "right." What a huge cantle out of his diminished heritage would that be! He would not permit himself, within sight of that magnificent domain, to think it possible that she could be left sole heiress, although, a few hours ago, even that had appeared to

him not utterly out of the question ; and her statement that she would, in such a case, make ample amends, had given him comfort. No, he would not contemplate such a contingency as that. But to find Kate placed in anything like affluent circumstances—independently of its being done at his expense—that would be most unwelcome, since it would make her more difficult to win. To do him justice, Richard Anstey had no conceit with respect to his own powers of pleasing. Her refusal of his hand that morning had wounded no self-esteem. He had not imagined himself beloved by his cousin, although he was far from guessing how much she disliked him. Curiously enough, notwithstanding that her own attraction for him was very strong, he did not take liking much into account when estimating his chances of winning Kate. He could not conceive that any girl could shut her eyes to practical advantages ; and although

he had been rejected as a man of great expectations, he had good hope to be looked upon more favourably as Sir Richard Anstey, Bart., with a rent-roll of eight thousand a year. If, at the same time, she was herself poor, or, still better, in debt, as she had hinted (here he made a memorandum to send Hoskins to Blondel Regis, the nearest town to Blondel Parva, to make private inquiries as to whether the widow owed money there), and if Sir Nicholas had adhered to his last resolve of leaving her but five hundred pounds, then his chance with the girl would be almost assured; nay, it would be a deuced generous thing in him to take her.

Twice during the night, these calculations or forebodings of Mr. Richard were boisterously interrupted: once came a horseman at full speed down the avenue, and thundered at the lodge-door to rouse the porter; and once, towards morning, a carriage-and-four

flew through the gates, which had been set wide in expectation of its arrival, and tore up the hill to the Court.

Richard rightly guessed that some physician had been sent for on a sudden, in addition to the ordinary medical attendant that was retained in the house, and that the end was surely drawing very near.

CHAPTER VIII.

“QUICK, QUICK.”

THE news that Hoskins brought up-stairs with Mr. Richard's breakfast, next morning, was, that Sir Nicholas “had been took with a fit or summut,” during the night, but had since rallied considerably. The guests at the Court, however, were to leave by an early train, and the physician lately summoned was still in attendance.

“They know as you are here, sir,” said the landlord, his manner growing perceptibly more respectful as the change of patrons grew more imminent. “Her Ladyship has sent to beg you will step up. She was about to despatch a messenger for you to Blondel, when she was informed of your arrival here.”

“Very likely indeed, I should think,” observed Richard, cynically. “However, that reminds me, Hoskins”—and it was curious how the young man’s manner towards his inferior had also changed since the last few hours; it was no longer peevish, but condescendingly familiar—“if you can make it convenient, I wish you to go over to Blondel Regis, and make inquiries, in a quiet way, concerning Mrs. Irby’s affairs. I am almost afraid they are growing embarrassed. Find out whether she owes much money to the trades-people; do you understand?”

“Yes, Sir Richard—I beg pardon, *Mr.* Richard.”

There was no necessity to apologise for the mistake. A look of gratified vanity stole over the young man’s face, in spite of himself, though the next moment it wore its habitual look of reserve and prudence.

“Who was the other witness, beside your-

self, to that will of Sir Nicholas of which we were talking the last time I was here, Hoskins?”

“Bob Dene, sir, the head gamekeeper: him as was shot in Swinlake Spinney, the year before last, by the poachers.”

“O yes, I remember—poor fellow!” returned the other carelessly. “I hope my uncle provided for his family in a proper manner?”

“Well, Mr. Richard, I daresay he *would* ha’ done it, if Bob had happened to be married, but he was a bachelor. Not, indeed, as that *always*——” But here the facetious landlord became conscious that his pleasantry was misplaced, and cut it short with a dry cough, addressed in confidence to the palm of his hand.

“Well, I shall go up to the Court as soon as these strangers are gone, Hoskins, and not before. Their presence there at such a time is absolutely indecent.—Talk of the

devil, &c. &c. Here comes the wagonette with the very people, if I don't mistake. Umph! Those young fellows are really not ill dressed. I wonder where Charles and Leonard pick up their friends!—There now, as soon as I have had my cigar, I shall stroll up. And you will not forget that little commission of mine, Hoskins. It is market-day at Blondel Regis, to-day, is it not?—and the very best of times to pick up any local rumours—so you had better start at once.”

Whereupon the obsequious landlord left the room to harness the mare to the spring-cart. The park-gates were still wide open, suggesting thereby present calamity, like those of the Temple of Janus, or the authority that forgets a dying master: and Richard Anstey passed through them unobserved by the porter.

“He had better look a little sharper when he is in *my* service,” muttered the young man, whose vision was not so obscured by

grief but that he had an eye to business. “ Suppose any of the deer were to get out, or one of those thievish tramps get in ! ”

There was no one to be seen about. In the tapering avenue, his own was the only shadow that crossed the chequer-work thrown by branch and leaf, and the great sunlit park stretched far and wide on both sides, untenanted by human creature ; but as he drew near to the east terrace that fronted the house, fitter for some military display than for the strutting to and fro of the half-dozen peacocks that generally held it in possession, he saw two gentlemen standing together by the great hall-door. They saw him too, and came slowly forward as if to greet him. One was a man of middle age, and the other nearly twenty years his junior ; the former was fair, the other dark ; they had nothing in common between them except the bronze upon their cheeks, the result of much exposure to the elements,

for they were both keen sportsmen; yet they were half-brothers.

“How are you, Mr. Marston? How are you, Mr. Irving?” said Richard, carelessly.

They lifted their hats in salutation, as he had done; but Richard passed coolly on before they could make any reply.

“If they flattered themselves I was going to call them Charles and Leonard *now*,” soliloquised he, “they are most uncommonly mistaken.”

They were his uncle’s sons, by different mothers, and lived at the Court: the establishment of Sir Nicholas being patriarchal in that respect, and comprehending three distinct families. There was Mr. Marston, who had his own apartments and stables; Mr. Irving, who had ditto, ditto; and she whom Hoskins had satirically called “her Ladyship,” who ruled the house, and was in her turn ruled by her little son Leopold.

The great outer door stood open, and

through the inner doors of glass, Richard gazed on the huge entrance-hall, and broad branching staircase, irresolute whether to ring the bell or announce himself. Presently deciding on the latter course, he pushed his way in. There was none to stop him. His footsteps on the tessellated pavement evoked only echoes. The fountain was not playing—the machinery having been neglected of late, as such matters are apt to be in times of domestic trouble—but the place was charmingly cool. The tiled floor, the polished marble-lined walls, the lofty ceiling—on which was represented some elaborate pastoral story—the pillars that supported it, and the two huge malachite vases, one on either side the stairs, all seemed to scatter coolness, just as, without doors, in that sultry forenoon, all things reflected heat. To the right, and opening directly on the hall, was the statue gallery, a double line of graceful groups and single

figures, intermingled with flowers and ferns—white marble, and green leaf, and scarlet blossom. Beyond it lay the picture-rooms, with their brown and shining floors uncarpeted, and save that there was a sprinkling of arm-chairs, in which you could recline and feast upon the treasures on the walls, unfurnished. Here Reubens's nude unblushing beauties glowed; here Rembrandt's dusky forms grew into life and light the more you gazed; here Claude would have you bask in southern sunshine; here Poussin beckoned to his shady groves. Richard strode straight on, blind to all triumphs of art—though not without a general notion that the scenes were well set forth, and the judgment sound that had selected them, and a particular sense that they were worth a good deal of money, and would be his own in a few hours—until he drew near a half-opened door, which, he knew, was that of “her Ladyship's” boudoir.

Then he trod as softly as he could, and paused, and listened. There were two voices talking within—a woman’s and a child’s—and through the hinge of the door, Richard could see the speakers. One was a dark lady, with a sad and thoughtful face; her age, as he knew it to be, was about thirty, but she looked much more than that; her dress was simple, but not slovenly, as Hoskins had implied; her thin white fingers rested on the curly head of a little boy of six, evidently her own son, though his eyes were bright with the anticipations of youth, while hers reflected the sad experience of years. At present, however, even the boy’s face was grave.

“Yes, darling,” answered she tenderly to some question of the child’s; “he does look very ill; but he was kind to us, was he not, poor papa?”

“Yes,” returned the boy, after a little hesitation. “Shall I be taken to see him any more?”

His mother shook her head, and turned her face to the window, that he might not see its look, for there was something worse than sorrow on it.

“If papa dies, shall I still have my little pony, mamma, and Mimmie to wait upon me?”

“Hush! Yes. Why do you ask, Lippy? You should not be thinking of such things now.”

“Because John once said,” continued the boy with childish persistence, “when he was angry with me about that whip I broke, that when Sir Nicholas died, you and I would have to ‘turn out.’ What did John mean by that?”

A dangerous light gleamed in the lady’s eyes, and she drew herself up to her full height. “Did he really dare to say that, Lippy?”

“Yes, mamma. But I promised him not to tell, only I forgot: so you must not be angry with him; I like old John.”

The mother turned, and smiling, stooped down, and kissed the child.

“Shall we have to leave the Court, as Mrs. Placet had to leave the rectory, mamma, when her husband died, and the new rector came?”

“Yes, Lippy.”

“And shall you have to wear a horrid widow’s cap, mamma, as Mrs. Placet does?”

“No, Lippy.”

Just those two words, and yet with such pathetic meaning in their tone that even the child was awed by it into silence. He looked up with inquiring wonder into his mother’s face, and she sat down, and snatched him up on her lap, and burst into a torrent of tears.

“It’s deuced lucky she began to cry,” murmured Richard to himself, as he stepped back with caution; “I was afraid they would have found me out, they kept so precious quiet.—Ahem, ahem!” here he cleared his throat, and once more approached

the boudoir, but this time designedly with heavy tread. He knocked sharply at the door, and a voice, it would have been hard to identify with that of the previous speaker, bade him "Come in."

A woman's, nay, a lady's voice, but firm almost to peremptoriness; not a trace of humiliation lurked within it now, and scarcely a tinge of sorrow. She had expected a servant's summons, and she was not one to exhibit weakness before a servant.

When she saw that it was no servant, but her enemy, the last shadow-skirts of her depression vanished; she was mistress of herself at once, and of the situation.

"I am glad you are come, Mr. Richard," said she gravely, stretching out her hand, which he took politely enough. "If I had known how serious your uncle's condition had been, I should have sent for you before this. Up to yesterday, even, we had good hopes; but last night, and this

morning——” She looked towards the child, and Richard nodded in token that he understood her.

“ Are both doctors agreed ? ” inquired he.

“ Both. It is a question of a few days, perhaps hours ; that is all. But I am thankful to say he suffers but little save from want of rest. The reason why I am not with him is that he has been left quite alone in hopes that he may get some sleep ; but it is now time that he should take his medicine. Will you come with me at once and see him ?—Good.—You will stay here, Lippy, like a good boy, till I come back.—Sir Nicholas is in the Blue Parlour ; he has not been up-stairs for months.”

She moved towards a doorway hung with heavy curtains, which opened into another picture-room, the oak-floor of which had been thickly carpeted to deaden sound. As she laid her fingers lightly on the handle of a door upon the right, she whispered : “ He

lies here : you must be prepared to find your uncle greatly altered."

The next moment they were in the sick man's room. This was a small apartment, with two windows opening upon a little garden, and hung, as its name implied, with blue. Except for the unseasonable fire in the hearth—albeit the fever was upon the patient now, and not the chill—and for the presence of the bed and its occupant, it was a very cheerful room ; but the exceptions marred it sadly.

An old man, who had evidently once been very handsome, but with wasted features, and wearing that pinched look which is humanity's almost universal expression when near its end, lay there propped with pillows, and on a bed of down, yet with eyes that hungered for their sleep in vain.

"Why did you leave me, Meg?" exclaimed he, querulously. "It is hard to be left so long alone."

“You sent me away yourself, Nicholas, and insisted on my not returning until it was time for you to take your draught.”

“Did I? Perhaps I did. I am glad you are come now, at all events. I have had no sleep; I shall never sleep again.—Who is that you have brought with you? I will not see either of those damned doctors again.”

“It is I, Sir Nicholas,” said the young man, stepping forward to the foot of the bed. “I am exceedingly sorry to find you so far from well.”

“That is a lie, Nephew Richard. You are exceedingly pleased to find me so near to death.”

This remark, embarrassing under any circumstances, was particularly awkward, inasmuch as all present were aware that it was true.

“However,” continued the sick man, ungraciously, “it is as well that you are come.

You are near to me, if not especially dear ; and you can do no harm, thank Heaven. Meg and Lippy are well provided for, and also Charles and Leonard. It is quite right that you should be here to take possession of your own when I am gone. You will not have to wait many hours. In the meantime, I can dispense with your presence.—Meg, give your orders that a room be prepared at once for Mr. Richard Anstey.—You need not look like that, sir,” cried he, excitedly. “She is mistress here while the breath is in my body. Moreover, she is worth ten thousand of you ; and it is she I have wronged, and not you.—Meg, he hates you, this scoundrel. I will not have him about my deathbed.—Do you hear me, sir ? .Go !”

The old man spoke with such shrill vehemence that Richard was quite alarmed. Was it possible that so much vigour could exist with a condition utterly hopeless ?

“I will cut you off with a shilling !”

screamed Sir Nicholas.—“There ; I knew that would make him go !” chuckled he, the perspiration standing out on his forehead, and his breath coming in painful gasps.—“What a rogue that is, wench !—Is he gone, or is he listening at the door ? He was always one for that. He would turn you out of house and home—you and Lippy ; and have you whipped, if he could. Did you not see how he looked at you when I said ‘give orders ?’ Damn him ! I will not have him here.”

“Hush, hush ! Sir Nicholas.”

But there was no occasion to say “Hush !” now. Thoroughly prostrated by that access of passion, the sick man closed his eyes, and seemed to sink into the pillow. The lady whom he had called Meg bent over him, not indeed with love, but with that pity which is near akin to it, and smoothed the sheet about his shoulders, and touched his forehead with some cool and fragrant mixture. She

sat down behind the bed-curtain, and watched until his breathing shewed that exhaustion had induced sleep, then noiselessly withdrew to where she had left her little son. A wife worthy of the name would not perhaps have done so ; yet she was only obeying the doctor's orders. Want of sleep was the chief torture from which the baronet was now suffering ; and narcotics, instead of alleviating, only seemed to aggravate his painful and unnatural wakefulness. If she remained with him now, it was possible she might be summoned from without, and a knock at the door, however gentle, would have roused him instantly. A silken cord lay on the coverlet, communicating with a bell in her own apartment, and she placed it carefully close to his wasted fingers, before she left the room.

A soft west wind came in at an open window, bearing, with the scent of the flowers, the dreamy caw of the rooks on the gently

swaying elms, and the slumbrous coo of the wild pigeon from the more distant woods; otherwise, all was silent, save for that laboured breathing which was so soon to be stilled.

Was it the snapping of a twig without? or the alighting of a bird upon the window-sill? Or did some far-off door in that stately mansion undutifully jar, and rouse its master? Some slight noise, he knew not what, had smitten suddenly on the sick man's ear, and awakened him thoroughly. Was it long, or only a little time—was it an hour or a minute, that he had been asleep and alone?—All was quite still, but the mischief had been done. It seemed to him now, indeed, that he should never get to sleep again until the last sleep of all. And yet he would not ring for Meg. He was not in absolute pain, and the best chance for those aching eyes to close was for him to remain alone. But they did not close: they stared

through that open window upon the brilliant garden-plot with its pleasant arbour and surrounding shrubbery, and beheld many things beside.

They looked forth upon a wasted life—a life of sensual and selfish pleasure, and beyond it upon Death the Avenger. It had been Sir Nicholas Anstey's boast that he could never be frightened by a priest; and indeed his was not that Deathbed of the Infidel of which most of us have read, if few have seen: but he was come to that place—the last stage of human travel—from whence men strain their eyes into the past, in hopes to find some ground of comfort. His memory, flitting from scene to scene of vice and dissipation, strove in vain to light on some oasis in that now arid desert, which had once seemed so rich with fruit and bright with blossom, on which to rest, if but for a little space, and fold in peace its wearied wing; some act of charity; some deed of

unselfish kindness ; the recollection of some well-doing, however slight and transient. But alas ! it could find *none*. The long account of his evil passions and their reckless gratification lay open before him, with nothing on the *per contra* side—only a blank page, which there was now no time to inscribe with the exercise of a single virtue. He had known ruined gamblers—men he had helped to ruin—with the alternative of suicide or a life of wretched penury before them, to indulge for one last evening, ere they chose the former, in some wild debauch ; but even this was denied to *him*. He had not the strength to lift a glass of wine to his lips, far less did he possess the power of enjoying it. His fortune indeed was his own, and would remain so while his breath was yet in his body, and even after it would serve for speech ; it was his own “for life.”—What a perpetuity of existence had that phrase once conveyed ; and now it was

dwindled to a few painful hours !—Nay, it was his own still further, for he could bequeath it to whom he pleased by will. He had been wont to take credit to himself for leaving his illegitimate offspring well provided for, and not neglecting them, like other men of the world he knew, but he had come to that pass when he could no longer impute to himself a virtue without cause. It was not such a very generous action, after all, to enrich his own flesh and blood at the expense of an heir whom he disliked ; and as for what he had given to Meg, he had never ventured to congratulate himself upon that arrangement, even in his most complacent moods. If he had given her all, he could never have made up for what he had taken away from her ; for the bitter wrong he had inflicted, the base deception he had practised, the villany with which he had repaid her for her simple trust. The world, indeed, if the matter had been canvassed in

society, would probably have taken his side, and discredited his victim's story, but what could that avail him now? No one knew but he—not even the woman herself, else how could she have forgiven him?—the utter heartlessness of his falsehood, the passionless premeditation of his crime. Many a fair one's face, whose brightness he had changed to shadow, and whose smile to tears, thronged unbidden and unwelcome before his restless gaze, but none with such rebuke in it as hers—the daughter of his companion and familiar friend, intrusted with dying lips to his protecting care——
Whose face was that at the window?
 Whose eyes had looked into his own but for one instant, yet all sufficient for mutual recognition?

In the physical reality of the vision, his reason refused to believe. Had the devil indeed thus summoned him in the person of a messenger whose credentials he could not

dispute ? or was it a figment of his disordered brain ? were the alternatives which presented themselves. It was the face of another dead companion to whom he had done a wrong only less base and perfidious than to Meg's father, and one which had had, indirectly, fatal consequences.

Sir Nicholas had always held that Robert Irby, being almost penniless, and grievously oppressed with debt, had drowned himself designedly, in order that his family should reap the benefit of his heavy insurances. It was just the sort of half-chivalrous, half-scoundrelly action which would have recommended itself to a character, at the same time affectionate and unprincipled, like that of Irby. And the thing that had originally sapped his fortune, and eventually brought him to that unhappy end, was the loss of those ten thousand pounds of which his friend had so treacherously robbed him. This deed was not in reality the worst by

many that could be laid at the sick man's door, but it was the one which the baronet had always found most difficulty in reconciling with his conscience, easy and pliable though it was; it was a crime that should have been out of the catalogue of the offences of a man of his quality, one repugnant even to that elastic code of morals in use among “men of honour;” and the recollection of it had often galled him more than he liked to own even to himself.

Perhaps, if the man had borne himself with greater moderation under his wrong, and not so indignantly appealed against it, Sir Nicholas would have made amends; but as it was, Irby's conduct had only produced, as has been narrated, a second injury. The baronet had revoked the will that made his godchild Kate his heiress, save for five hundred pounds left to his nephew, and made another which reversed those bequests. Here, however, reparation could yet be

made, if he had only time. This idea, by excluding other subjects of thought, afforded him, by comparison, what was almost a pleasure, and he snatched at it, as he had done through life at all things in pleasure's shape. But *was* there time? To devise a new will, however short—to narrate, however briefly, his wishes—to sign, and seal, and deliver, he felt there was *not* time. Moreover, if there had been, he would scarcely have liked to leave Kate Irby, by solemn bequest, those ten thousand pounds which men would have said were the reparation for what he must have all along been conscious was a fraud upon her father. Sir Nicholas, like some others who are reckless of their character while alive, was tenacious of his reputation after death; he still clung, posthumously, to the skirts of that respectability which he had cast off his own person as an encumbrance; and, indeed, it was owing to some feeling of this kind that he

had bequeathed so much of his fortune as he had done to the nephew whom he hated. No, a new will could not be made; but something might be done in another way. His feeble fingers clutched the bell-rope, and when Margaret answered the summons, his feeble voice murmured: “Send for Richard.”

“For Richard, Sir Nicholas!” ejaculated the astonished woman, with the recollection of that scene between uncle and nephew so fresh in her mind. “Do you not mean Charles or Leonard?”

“No, Meg; I have seen them and our own little Lippy for the last time, but I must see Nephew Richard over again. Quick, quick!”

But it was to no purpose that the baronet reiterated that “Quick, quick!” and griping the sheet with fretful fingers, gasped out his impatience and distress. Richard had gone forth none knew whither, enraged at his reception by his uncle, and did not return

until evening. Doubtless, he hoped to find that the baronet was dead ; but coming back from his aimless walk through mead and woodland—perhaps by that time, thought he, all his own—he called at the *Anstey Arms*, resolving to remain there rather than at the Court, and received from Mr. Hoskins (with certain other intelligence) his uncle's urgent summons, which—not without some tremor mingled with his great surprise—he hastened to obey.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

RICHARD ANSTEY was only just in time. The tide of the sick man's life was almost at its lowest ebb; and there was to be no more flow. His face wore that unmistakeable look of farewell on which the coffin-lid is soon to lie. At a glance from him, for he had no breath to spare, nor strength to make sign, Margaret left the room, and uncle and nephew were alone.

Richard drew quite close to the pillow, and waited patiently—and perhaps with some touch of pity—his advantage in youth and health over this poor sinking wretch was so enormous—for the struggling lips to speak. “Give me brandy, Dick.”

The baronet had not called his nephew by that familiar name since he had grown up to manhood, and the hard face softened for a moment, as it listened. Years ago, when he was a schoolboy, and before certain disagreements had taken place, Sir Nicholas had been kind to him after his fashion; tolerably lavish in the way of "tips," and always ready (since that cost nothing) to ask for a holiday for him; these things came to the young man's remembrance now, and he forgot, for a moment, to cherish the remembrance of his wrongs as he filled the wine-glass, and put it carefully to the sick man's lips.

"Thank you, Dick," murmured the baronet in distincter accents. "I am sorry to have spoken as I did, a while ago. You must forgive a dying man—your father's brother."

"I do, uncle."

"I have left you all I have to leave, Dick

—the will lies in yonder desk—and it is more than you think for: you will have nine thousand pounds a year.”

A look of pleasure, perhaps of gratitude, lighted up the young man’s face.

“Does that satisfy you, Nephew Richard?”

“It is much more than I expected, sir, and I thank you.”

“Good. That is the rent-roll you will have, if you obey my last request, which I am now about to make to you; if you neglect it, you will have more, but the curse of a dying man will cling to you. Years ago, I won ten thousand pounds of Robert Irby. I desire that that sum—and there is more than that in my banker’s hands—shall be paid over to his daughter Kate at once.”

Richard made no reply. Not a sound was to be heard within, save the fall of an ember in the grate; but without, there was a rustle in the shrubs—doubtless the tiny

patter of the laurel leaves stirred by the evening breeze.

“Do you hear me, nephew? This money was obtained unjustly, and must be repaid. Promise me that—you—will—do—this.”

“Why not have done it yourself, uncle, during these many years? Why not have made a deed of gift to Kate, as to so many others?”

“You should not taunt a man so near to death,” murmured Sir Nicholas faintly. “I ought to have done it, but I was proud, and did not care to shew, by doing it, that I had wronged him. Now, all seems different. Richard, as sure as I am drawing near my end, I saw dead Robert Irby’s face at yonder window not six hours ago.—You smile, nephew; you think you see a way to keep this money, and yet salve your conscience. You will say to yourself: ‘My uncle was wandering in his mind, and knew not what he said towards the last.’—I see by your

face that I have guessed aright, and if so, my wits cannot have left me, Richard. And indeed they have not. I know that Robert is dead as well as you do, and therefore that I could not have seen him in the flesh ; but I did see him ! He came to remind me of the evil I had done to him and his, and to bid me repair it." His failing breath could scarcely shape itself into words, but still it struggled on. "I desire to do so with all my heart—with all my heart."

"It shall be done, uncle."

There was a twitching of the lips, as though the dying man had tried to smile his thanks, and then not a feature stirred. The mobile face, once instinct with so many passions, was set for ever.

For the first time, in that ensuing silence, Richard became aware that there was a clock in the room ; every beat of its tiny pendulum seemed to strike upon his brain, and say : "Dead, dead, dead, dead !" But

though the stillness was grown so oppressive, and the shadow of death lay already everywhere, he bent down his ear to the dumb white lips, to satisfy himself that all was over. He was not unawed ; but the worldly prudence, that was habitual with him, soon conquered the unaccustomed horror. Something he had been thinking about since yesterday, after his interview with Kate, but which had recurred to him with greater force within the last hour, was to be put in practice now—at once—if it was to be done at all. The opportunity had been offered to him beyond all expectation.

Rising noiselessly, and treading softly, he crossed the room, and opening his uncle's desk, drew forth the will of which the latter had so lately spoken. It was the same one which had been drawn up years ago, at the time of Sir Nicholas's quarrel with Robert Irby, and Richard was familiar, thanks to Jem Hoskins, with its contents ;

but, nevertheless, he ran his eye carefully over them. The witnesses were the landlord of the *Anstey Arms* and Robert Dene.

“She shall have her five hundred pounds,” muttered Richard, “but not by this will. She shall have her ten thousand pounds, too—when she becomes my wife.”

He threw the will upon the slumbering fire, and presently the tongues of flame began to lap it round.

“She shall have her five hundred pounds,” continued he musing, “but not now. ‘Over head and ears in debt,’ was Hoskins’s report, and therefore the more easily won.”

A slight noise at the still open casement made him start with a guilty look. Some leaves of the creeper that hung about it had flapped against the window-ledge; yes, that was surely all. Yet the sweat stood upon his forehead as he turned to listen. True, as he reasoned, he was doing no moral

wrong : he meant to give the money as it was willed ; he meant even to give the larger sum, in accordance with the dead man's wishes—he would settle it upon her—on their marriage : he was going to act not only honestly, but honourably. In the meantime, however, he was committing a felony, and that is apt to make a novice somewhat nervous. Once burned, there was small chance of the will being inquired for. It was not likely that Sir Nicholas had informed “her Ladyship” concerning a matter that in no way affected her ; there was only Hoskins—a man devoted to his interests—who probably knew of its existence. There was absolutely no danger in what he was doing, for who would credit that he would destroy a will that left him all, save a miserable five hundred pounds, merely to make himself sole heir?—But just while the parchment was becoming ashes, Richard Anstey experienced qualms, tremors.

Above the fireplace was a large mirror, that reflected all things in the now ghastly room, except that ghastliest sight which was hidden by the bed-curtains. Richard was looking in it at his own scared and anxious visage, when another and unlooked-for face presented itself therein ; it, too, was haggard and anxious, but not scared : a face, alive with hate and exultation, and cognizant, if expression ever showed cognizance, of the unlawful deed in which he was engaged, was peering in at the open window. For a moment and more, Richard stood rooted to the spot—paralysed with terror ; overwhelmed with the possible consequences of discovery that thronged upon him. Then he sprang to the casement, and leaped out.

There was no man to be seen. The soft evening light fell only on the grateful flowers, the thick belt of shining laurels, and the quaint old summer-house, with its roof of

pine and fringe of fir-cones. Could the intruder be *there*? Or did that rustling in yonder shrubbery mark the course of his fleeing footsteps? If he had fled, would it be well to follow? Suppose this man were overtaken, seized, and given into custody—what tale might he not tell? If, on the other hand, he were in the arbour, would it not be well, thought Richard, to know with whom he had to deal; and perhaps to deal with him? Involuntarily, the young man had snatched up the poker, and he felt that in his now desperate hand the shining steel was a weapon that could be relied on. The face he had seen was of a man advanced in years, and probably a feeble one, and Richard was not thinking of self-defence.

He pushed open the half-closed door with savage impatience, but the place was empty. The light from its little painted windows played fancifully upon the round oak-table and the few rustic chairs that formed its

furniture. Years ago, his uncle had been wont to sit and smoke there : Richard remembered to have had coffee there himself, during his last visit to the Court ; but there was not a sign of recent occupation. Was it possible that he had been the victim of some delusion, as Sir Nicholas had been ? Or suppose—and a cold sweat came out upon him with this second thought—that Sir Nicholas had *not* been deluded ! Of whom was it that that old and haggard face indistinctly reminded him, now that he came to think about it, but of his uncle's friend, Kate Irby's father ! And yet that could not be, unless the sea should have given up its dead. That somebody had, in reality, been witness to his recent doings was, however, now certain, for he saw that the flower-bed beneath the window-sill had been trampled upon, and the marks of feet were plainly evident in the black mould.

How changed were his feelings from those

of a quarter of an hour ago! What a slip had happened between the cup and his lip! All had then been triumph and security: now, nothing presented itself to his mind but uncertainty and danger. Suppose some one should have entered that room within the last few minutes—during his absence—and found the parchment not entirely consumed! It was necessary to look to this last matter at once, and yet the young man had grown so utterly unnerved that to re-enter that chamber of death was abhorrent to him. He looked in, and all was still as before, except for that ticking, nay, that tolling of the clock on the mantelpiece. He dared not turn his eyes upon the bed, where that dreadful shape showed itself so ghastly through the coverlet; but, keeping his face towards the fire, he crept in, and heaped the coals together on the few white ashes which were all that remained of that will, he would now have given twice those five hundred

pounds to have never touched ; then pulled the bell-handle with frantic force, to summon he cared not whom, so that they only came and left him in that hateful room alone no longer.

CHAPTER X.

CROSS-PURPOSES.

So well did Maurice Glyn recommend himself to the favour of Mrs. Irby, during that afternoon of their first acquaintance, that she insisted upon his staying at the manor-house to dine ; and to combat his unwillingness to leave his friend and host alone at the vicarage, a messenger was despatched to invite the curate also.

Maurice well knew that Milton would not come ; but the two had already had an early dinner, and doubtless he did not feel the scruples about deserting him, which he would have done in the case of the more important meal. Moreover, was it not in the curate's own interests that he (Maurice) was at the manor-house at all,

and was making himself so very agreeable there? Of course it was. And yet he found himself reiterating that argument again and again in his own mind, just as though there had been some question about it. If his well-meant attentions had been confined to his friend's possible mother-in-law, his conscience would not certainly have thus disturbed him; but what occasion was there, it whispered, for him to so strenuously endeavour to ingratiate himself with Kate? Surely *that* was the Rev. Charles Milton's business, and not his. The system of wooing by proxy has always been attended with danger, from the time of Athelwold, and doubtless before it, until now.

Even after Richard Anstey had taken his departure for the railway station, Maurice still lingered, and freed from the restraint of her cousin's presence, Kate's conversation seemed even more agreeable than before. Hers was not the conventional talk he was

accustomed to hear from young ladies in London drawing-rooms, but imaginative, fresh, and natural. Her tastes in poetry and fiction were similar to his own, or perhaps rather to what *had* been his own before town-life and the calling of a reviewer had dulled the edge of literary enthusiasm, and made him more observant of defects, less sensitive to beauties. He saw his own mind (of which he had a very high opinion) reflected in hers; and as for the moral sentiments, for these he gave her that boundless credit which it is customary under such circumstances to bestow. The time—soft incense-breathing eve; and the place—a drawing-room, with its French windows opening wide on the old-fashioned garden—worked so well with the opportunity; mamma, behind the only pair of candles in the huge apartment, was nodding over the pages of a novel, and he and Kate were sitting in the twilight by the window-sill—

that Maurice almost forgot his mediatorial character, and began to imagine himself a principal. What was worse than all was, that now and then an apprehension flitted across his mind, that this young woman was not precisely the character suited to his friend—would fail, perhaps, in making him happy, or (what seemed quite as bad) would not herself find happiness with the prosaic curate. The clock in the old church tower boomed eleven on the silent night before the guest who had volunteered “to see the ladies home” at five, rose up to go.

No sooner, however, had Maurice Glyn left Kate’s presence than his sense of honour began, though tardily, to assert itself; he still felt the glamour of her charms, but knew that his duty was to avoid being subjected to their influence for the future. He had suffered himself to drift into something more than admiration for the girl, partly, it was true, because that kind of drifting is so

pleasant, but partly also from what some people call "devotion to their art:" he was always ready to place himself, without much thought of consequences, in any position which would produce him a new sensation, and thereby enable him to describe it. He fell in love, as some gentlemen, in the interests of science or philosophy, have bled themselves to death; at this stage, he had intended to murmur to himself, the heart beats with such and such rapidity; and at this, a little quicker; but somehow he had forgotten to record his experiences as they occurred; and now he had lost his heart altogether. Under these circumstances, although he was quite resolved to stick closely to the path of honour for the future, and not to trespass upon forbidden ground, he was not displeased to learn from the servant, on his arrival at the vicarage, that the curate had already retired for the night. He did not wish to be interrogated,

just then—"And how do you like my Kate?" "Is she not charming?" or (more especially), "Do you not congratulate me on my good fortune?" That last request he would have found to be a very severe trial of friendship. The executioner may ask his victim on the scaffold for forgiveness for the deed he is about to do, but he ought scarcely to look for approbation.

The curate also had his reasons for avoiding his friend's society for that night. He was equally averse to be questioned upon the events of the day, and he knew that cross-examination is apt to be less strict and searching in the morning than over the last pipe (or two) before going to bed.

Thus it happened that when they met at the breakfast-table, there was just a little embarrassment between them arising from the reticence which each was determined to maintain.

"I am afraid I deserted you, old fellow,

in a very shameful manner yesterday," said Glyn, as they shook hands; "but that dear old lady, Mrs. Irby (whom you do not half appreciate), would not hear of my coming home earlier."

"Don't mention it, my dear Maurice; it was my fault as much as yours; and I am glad you found things so pleasant up at the manor. Now that that man, Anstey, has gone, we will be up there as much as you like—— But what a quantity of letters you have! Our poor old postman will be demanding an increase of salary if your correspondence continues to be of that extent."

"Yes, it's a great nuisance: but we poor literary folks can never get away from the printing-press. Most of these are proofs—I have been correcting them in bed, for an hour and more—but I am sorry to say, Charley, there is something worse among them. I have received some intelligence—respecting a certain business matter—which

will cut short my stay here, and, indeed, necessitate my going up to town at once."

"What! You are surely not going to leave me, Maurice, upon the second day after your arrival," pleaded the curate; "just when I was looking forward to a pleasant fortnight at least with my old friend——"

"Yes, Charley," interrupted Glyn, touched with the other's evident regret and pain; "I think it will be better so; I do indeed."

"Better so, Maurice! Come, I am sure there is something here which needs to be explained. I do not believe in this sudden call to London. You are not surely annoyed with me because I did not sit up for you last night! It was not very hospitable, I confess; but I was rather depressed and out of sorts."

"No, no, Charley. It is not likely that I should quarrel with you, after so many

years, on such a ground as that; nor, indeed, on any ground; we understand one another far too well, I hope. But there is really a reason why I should leave this place, and the sooner the better."

"And what is that, Maurice?"

"It would only pain you to hear it."

"Nay, my friend; it would pain me much more if you left without an explanation."

"Well, then, this is the whole truth, Charley; I have unwittingly permitted myself to—to feel a greater interest in that beautiful young creature, who, I sincerely hope, will make your life a very happy one as your wife, than I ought to feel. I am more impulsive than you are, old friend, and doubtless not so well-principled, or it would never have happened: but, as it is, it is better for me to leave Blondel. When you are married, I will come and finish my visit, and be godfather to your first baby; but, in

the meantime, I shall go back to the musty old Temple, and work there, instead of in your pleasant home : the loss will be mine every way ; and besides, I am afraid that I have already fallen in your estimation."

"No, Maurice, no," said the curate, laying his hand affectionately upon the other's shoulder ; "on the contrary, I esteem you more than ever. To flee from a temptation is often as difficult as to overcome it. But—forgive me—how is it possible that within such a very little time you should feel yourself in such danger ? It is to me astounding—incomprehensible."

"And to me too, Charley. I am not naturally tinder, nor even tender," (here he tried to laugh in his old way, but there was no music in it), "with respect to the fair sex ; but the half-dozen hours or so I passed with that lovely girl, so simple, so charming——"

"The half-dozen hours !" ejaculated the curate, his Saxon face a-glow with in-

dignation ; “you didn’t see her for ten minutes !”

“Why, you must be mad, Milton,” rejoined the other : “I was at the manor-house from five o’clock to eleven—although, indeed, it *seemed*, as you say, less than a quarter of an hour. Come—it is unpleasant for us, you see, even to converse about this matter. I told you it would only give you pain. I shall go and pack up my traps at once.”

“Stop a bit,” said the curate, in whose honest face amusement and embarrassment began to struggle. “I think there is a little mistake here. You have fallen in love with Miss Kate Irby, have you not ?”

“I don’t say that, Milton. But I think, if I staid here longer, I should feel more warmly than is becoming, towards one whom my friend hopes to make his wife.”

“My dear fellow, you may feel just as warmly towards her as you like,” returned

the curate, chuckling. "Don't think of me, I beg. I give her up to you as Pathfinder gave up Mabel in one of those books of Cooper's that we used to read together, lying on the shady river-bank, in the old May terms at Trinity. To deny ourselves any advantage for the benefit of another, is the greatest pleasure (and, indeed, about the only one) in which we poor clergymen can indulge. Take her, Maurice; I wish you may get her—I really do; and I will perform the marriage service without fee.—My good friend," continued he, with a merriment that became almost uproarious, as Maurice stood staring at him with mute astonishment, and not without apprehension for the other's wits, "I don't *want* her: it was only your own ridiculous supposition—suggested by that sagacity in all human affairs about which you pride yourself—that I ever did want her. Kate Irby is nothing to me, nor I to her."

Then, for the first time (so occupied had he been with his own difficulties), the recollection of beautiful Mary Grange, and of the combat he had witnessed, doubtless upon her account, between Anstey and the curate, occurred to Maurice Glyn. He conjectured rightly that Milton had no intention of communicating the details of the latter event, of which he little imagined his friend had been a witness; and chagrined at his own mistake and at his host's triumphant hilarity, Maurice revengefully resolved to prolong the misunderstanding.

"Well, Milton," said he gravely, "I confess that I have been utterly deceived, but then I did not think you were one who would ever contemplate a match which the world would call unequal."

"I don't care much about 'the world,'" returned the curate warmly; "much less indeed, perhaps, than some folk who pique themselves upon being unconventional. But

if any inequality does exist, the advantage is not upon my side. She may be poor, but then I myself am not rich; she has the mind of a true gentlewoman; she is sufficiently educated—you would be astonished if you knew how much she has taught herself—she is virtuous, pure, and beautiful. I confess, therefore, I do not see ‘the inequality’ you speak of.”

“My dear Milton, pray forgive me; I was only thinking of your respective ages. While readily granting all that you have said about her in other respects, Mrs. Irby must surely be very considerably your senior?”

“Mrs. Irby, Mrs. Fiddlestickends!” roared the curate, and Maurice Glyn roared with him, so that the former could not but perceive that his friend had been only jesting, and put forth his hand at once in token of reconciliation.

“No,” said the curate with cheerful gra-

vity, "my love is much more lowly placed than on the lady of the manor; I am content with" (here he hesitated to swallow a little pride)—"with her dependant, Mary Grange. But you must please to keep this secret, which you have so curiously compelled me to reveal, to yourself, Maurice; not, Heaven knows, that I am ashamed of my choice, but simply that Mary herself knows nothing about it, and may perhaps never know. I am no accepted lover. She is not one to catch at a man merely because he is above her in social position; and then there is my uncle's consent to gain, which as you may guess, will be a very difficult matter."

"I am afraid it will," answered Maurice thoughtfully, and then was silent. He was calling to mind a certain vulgar, pompous personage he had met once or twice, and to whom, though he was his friend's uncle, he had not found it easy to be civil; who had exasperated him by leaving out his aspirates,

or putting them in unnecessarily, as when he congratulated himself (which he did frequently) upon being the harchitect of his own fortunes. Glyn was picturing how this undesirable individual was likely to receive the news that his only nephew and heir—"a lad as 'ad bin to a tiptop school and to college, sir, and was to 'ave as fat a living as money could buy"—had engaged himself, or was meditating that step, to the daughter of the blind gate-keeper of Blondel Priory.

And the Rev. Charles Milton, M.A., sat silent also, revolving the same difficulty, albeit in a more respectful spirit, in his anxious mind.

CHAPTER XI.

BY THE BANKS OF START.

IT may be easily imagined, after the explanation and confession of the Rev. Charles Milton, that Mr. Maurice Glyn postponed indefinitely the transaction of the important business which awaited him in town, and remained at Blondel Parva. It may also be conjectured that he spent his spare time up at the manor, and the guest of a hard-working parson, with the sole charge of a straggling parish, has a great deal of spare time. Mrs. Irby liked him better and better every day she saw him (and she saw him every day); and the same, and more, may be said of Kate.

There is no more favourable opportunity for a young gentleman to pay his addresses

than when the fair object of them has recently discarded some other suitor. It may be that, by reason of her thoughts being already directed altarwards, the more eligible swain finds his wooing made easy for him ; or may be the characteristic tenderness of the sex induces her to make prompt reparation for the coldness with which she has treated the one male creature by falling in love with the other. At all events, a rejection is very commonly followed by an acceptance, and matters were certainly tending this way in the present instance. If Maurice found Kate refreshing by comparison with fashionable misses, Kate beheld in Maurice something totally different to any man she had ever met with. She knew no society but that of the country, and had mixed but little even with that. Prosy old landowners and sporting young ones, with a few highly respectable parsons, made up the whole list of her male acquaintance, with the exception

of her cousin Richard, who, by no means unintelligent, had of late done his very best to exhibit sympathy with her tastes, but had succeeded only in exhibiting the effort it cost him to do so.

But here was a man who, without effort, seemed to anticipate her every idea ; who expressed, with eloquence and exactness, the vague thoughts that had often thronged her brain, the emotions that had so deeply moved her, she scarcely knew why. To her, his knowledge (by no means a very ample page) appeared universal, boundless ; his impatience of authority in matters of opinion, the independence of a mind that towered above its fellows ; the utterance of his lively fancy, jewels of wit, and jets of flawless epigram ; while his flow of animal spirits—and in this she was wiser than she knew, and almost right—she took for nothing less than genius. Maurice Glyn did not indeed possess that faculty divine ; but he would

have been a rare and pleasant companion anywhere : how much more then at Blondel Parva, where there had probably been nothing like him since the abbey was founded, and most certainly not before that epoch. The dull old manor-house was illumined by his presence, as by a sunbeam, or rather—since he was a product of the latest civilisation—by the lime-light or magnesium.

Curiously enough, the curate was, as a subject of conversation, avoided by Maurice now almost as much as when he imagined himself to be his proxy ; for he was not at liberty to speak of his friend's passion for Mary Grange, while, in connection with him, he could think of nothing else. What an incomprehensible affair it seemed, that such a stickler for convention and the proprieties as Milton, should suffer himself to be so taken captive by a pretty face ! Why, even he, Maurice Glyn, semi-Bohemian and despiser of dignities as he was, would have

hesitated to do the like, though unhampered by that city uncle of "disinheriting countenance," who frowned upon the curate in the background.

Then, again, fancy *her* father, Grange père, becoming a member of one's own family and household! Going about the parish (so Maurice pictured him), when his daughter, engaged in maternal cares perhaps, could not accompany him, with a dog in a string, who stopped short before every benevolent-looking individual from habit, and sat on his hind-legs! The thing was monstrous, and Milton must be mad. As for the girl's not accepting him, as the curate had hinted, that was the wildest offshoot of the whole insane idea. Without doubt, she would marry him to-morrow, if he asked her. As for remonstrating with his friend upon his infatuation, that, he knew from experience, would be labour in vain. He had done so, years ago, in the case of that pastry-cook's

daughter up at Cambridge, and Milton had received his advice with the good-nature of a Newfoundland dog, but also with the obstinacy of a jackass. "My dear Maurice," had been his smiling reply, "this lovely creature is my choice, in a matter where one chooses for one's-self; and as for her father being a pastry-cook, the trade by which my uncle made *his* money was a much less attractive one, I do assure you."

Milton would have married her, while an undergraduate, but for that "little affair" between her and Viscount Periwinkle of his own college, which fortunately revealed itself, just in time, in a manner that not even a lover could refuse to credit.

No; this young man, so ready to give place to his superiors that he seemed almost obsequious, had of his own position in the world the most modest notion, and any argument founded upon social inequality would, Maurice well knew, only intensify

his rash resolve. Thus, since nothing could be done for his friend, it was only reasonable that Maurice should concentrate his attention upon his own affairs, and while the curate's pastoral duties led him pretty often to that quarter of his parish in which the priory happened to be, the footsteps of his guest were turned as frequently towards the manor-house.

Upon a certain morning, calling there with some not very urgent message intrusted to him (not to say invented for him) by the curate, with respect to the bestowal of a bottle of port-wine upon some ailing parishioner in Tinker's Hollow, he found from the servant that Madam had gone to Blondel Regis in the pony-carriage, and that Miss Kate was also not within, but "walking somewheres in the grounds." If only he himself had been concerned, doubtless, Mr. Maurice Glyn would have left his visiting-card and departed, content with the above

reply ; but since his errand was one of charity—and since Madam was always so particular to do her duty in that respect—he judged it better to go in search of the young lady. He knew his way about the place by this time very well, and also Kate's favourite haunts ; but on this occasion she was neither feeding the carp in the round pond, nor busy in the walled garden ; nor did the fluttering of the fowls, nor the joyous barking of old Nero, proclaim her presence in the poultry-yard. From the top of the long lime-walk, however, he caught a glimmer of her light dress upon the river-bank, and hurrying down, there found her, pacing slowly to and fro, and so deep in thought that she was not aware of his approach until he reached her.

It was just the spot for melancholy musing, screened from the house and offices, and cut off from all intruders from without by the river Start, whose blood-red current ran by like a mill-race. A little bay, protected

by its promontory from the fierce stream, had once formed a bathing-place, and the ruins of some wooden structure were still standing there ; but the locality had been always dangerous, and since that fatal accident with which we are acquainted had taken place there, “the Cove,” as it was called, had never been used for bathing.

“I am afraid I am intruding upon you, Miss Irby—— Heaven forbid that I should have frightened you !”

But he *had* frightened her, nevertheless. At his first word, she had given quite a shriek of terror, and now she turned so deadly pale that he instinctively put out his arm to prevent her falling. .

“It is very foolish of me, Mr. Glyn,” said she ; “but I did not hear you coming, and the sudden shock——”

“Nay, Miss Irby ; it was my stupidity : I ought to have remembered that I was walking on turf, and made no more noise than

one of those disembodied spirits, about whose possible walking powers we are both agreed.—You did not think I *was* a ghost, did you ?”

Then it flashed upon Glyn’s mind, just a quarter of a second too late—as such flashes, unlike those of lightning, always do come, immediately *after* speech—that that was precisely the very thing she *had* thought, since this was the spot where her father had been drowned ; and the clever young gentleman wished for the moment that he had been drowned also, or born dumb.

“ I did not pass a very good night,” said she wearily ; “ and some news this morning has a little put me off my balance—that’s all.”

“ Some news ? ” inquired he anxiously. “ Not, I trust, bad news ? ”

“ Well, it is not good news,” returned she, with an attempt to smile ; “ though it is not what a philosopher would call ‘ bad,’

I have no doubt. But then, as I have confessed to you, I am not a philosopher ; on the contrary, I am always very sorry for myself whenever anything unpleasant happens."

"And sorry for others, I am sure, my dear Miss Irby."

"Well, I hope so ; indeed, it is upon dear mamma's account, more than on my own, that I am vexed this morning with this letter : you may read it if you please—there are no secrets between my mother and her correspondent (for the communication is addressed to her), and certainly none between the writer and me. You are a student of human nature, and it may interest you to learn how mean and hypocritical a gentleman, that is a baronet, may be."

"It is, without doubt, a very cautious piece of composition," observed Maurice thoughtfully, when he had read the letter ; "and yet it suggests a great deal." He

looked at her scrutinisingly enough, but she exhibited no shadow of embarrassment.

“It shows that the writer has neither honour nor honesty,” answered Kate with indignation. “I blush to think that the same blood runs in our veins. He knows, look you, that my mother is very far from rich, and that it is owing to this dead man—his uncle—that it is so; he knows that he is himself but a receiver of stolen goods.—But there; I beg your pardon; I have no right to trouble you with these family matters.”

“Do not say that, my dear Miss Irby; you have not indeed known me long, but I hope I am not considered as a stranger. None of my own people are alive, and to me—without one domestic tie—such a confidence as you have been pleased to show is much more than a compliment: it is a deep source of pleasure, I do assure you. If, without offence, I may offer to be of assis-

tance in any possible way, pray, command me. To suffer me to be of service to you, would be the greatest pleasure you could confer upon me."

"You are very kind, Mr. Glyn, for I am sure you mean much of what you say. But the fact is, nothing *can* be done. We have built too much upon expectations—however just ones. My mother, in her secret heart, has always regarded me as a sort of co-heiress with my cousin, and now the whole fabric has come down with a run. After all, it is not a matter to make the earth gape that this Sir Nicholas Anstey has chanced to die without remembering his cousin and god-child in his will, and, indeed, without having made one. We shall, however, have to leave the manor, and lead a very quiet life—not that we have hitherto lived particularly fast, mamma and I—in future. It troubles me to have to quit the old place.—But don't look so grave, Mr. Glyn," added

she smiling; "I shall not be compelled to take in plain needlework, and we shall doubtless have pudding upon Sundays still. Our poverty will be of the genteelest kind, and by no means like that of this unfortunate individual now coming up the lime-walk. I wonder how he managed to pass scathless by Nero's kennel."

The poverty of the approaching stranger could certainly, by no stretch of politeness, be termed "genteel." His clothes were no threadbare suit, but a mere heap of rags; his hat, no napless but well-brushed beaver, was a worn-out wideawake, with a jagged piece torn off the brim; his shoes had holes in them; and he carried a stick of black-thorn in his hand, which had little resemblance to an olive branch. But for a certain look of exhaustion and ill-health about him—which mitigated his effect, like the toothlessness of a savage dog—he would have been a most truculent fellow.

“There is no public footway here, Miss Irby, is there?” ejaculated Maurice, irritated by this inopportune intrusion. “Had I not better turn the man out?”

“No, no,” said Kate smiling. “I begin to have a great sympathy with trespassers, since we shall so soon have to turn out ourselves.—Hush, he does not see us. What on earth can he have come here for?”

“Not to bathe, I hope,” thought Maurice, “although a little water would do him no harm.”

The pair had sought no concealment, but the trunk of a large pollard on the bank chanced to intervene between them and the lime-walk, and completely shielded them from the mendicant’s observation. He came on at a rapid pace, although he halted in his gait, glancing to right and left, like some hunted creature, until he reached the ruined bath-house. There he stopped, and supporting himself upon his stick, regarded the

scene with fixed attention. There was little that was picturesque about it either ; a dark swift stream hurrying between two rows of pollarded willows to an unseen sea ; but it seemed to have a strange interest for this man.

“I am afraid the poor wretch is not quite in his right mind,” whispered Maurice.—The sound of his voice (for the stranger was very near them), or more probably his movement as he bent down to his companion’s ear, attracted the new-comer at once. Shading his eyes, as if to keep the sun off, though it might have been to conceal his own features, he regarded the pair with scrutinising suspicion ere he came limping up to where they stood.

“Hollo, my friend, I have seen your face before,” ejaculated Maurice.

But the mendicant, whose gaze was fixed, with a certain wistful earnestness, upon Kate, answered him not a word.

“What is it you want, my good man?” inquired she.

“Nothing,” returned he gravely—“nothing more. That is,” added he hastily, “nothing more than you can guess, young lady : money, clothes, victuals, anything that you and the gentleman have to bestow on a poor man.”

“A very modest string of requests, I am sure,” said Maurice laughing. “But you should not beg of the same person twice in a month ; that is bad policy. Gentlemen of your trade should have a good memory. Do you not remember me ?”

“Yes, yes ; I do remember you, sir,” returned the beggar, glancing at Glyn for the first time. “It is no wonder if I forget them I beg of, since I beg of all I meet ; but to recollect those from whom I receive something, that, as you say, ought to be an easy matter. You gave me some money at the Workhouse in Paddington, on Tuesday fortnight.”

“That was so,” explained Maurice to his companion. “I went to the Workhouse in search of copy, and found this interesting specimen of humanity among the rest.—But how is it you came to Blondel, my man? This is not a place in which to look for work.”

“That’s true, sir, I came here, as I suppose you do, for pleasure. In the summer months, people of my quality leave their London residences (in one of which we made acquaintance) for our seats in the country—there are very spacious ones in every district.”

The speaker addressed his words to Glyn, but his gaze was still centred on Kate—a yearning gaze—a beseeching and hungry one, as it seemed to her.

“You seem in great need,” said she, in pitying tones, “besides looking very ill and worn. If you will come up to the house, you shall have something to eat

and drink.—Mamma always sets her face against giving money to beggars,” whispered she to Glyn; “but oblige me, for I have left my purse within doors, by giving this poor fellow a shilling. Besides that dreadful cough of his, and his looking so near to death’s door, there is something about him which touches me.”

“I should be very sorry if anything about him touched *me*,” answered Glyn in the same low tones. “You are suffering your feelings to run away with your judgment, Miss Irby, but he shall have what you please.—Look here, my man. This young lady, who is not so well acquainted with your little devices as I am, imagines that you are as afflicted as you appear to be: that you have consumption and are lame, besides being in the last stage of starvation. You must not suppose that you have imposed upon *me* in these particulars; but here is a crown to buy you a new hat, for you certainly need one.”

“Yes, sir, the big dog yonder tore the brim off.”

“What! Nero?” exclaimed Kate. “I am very sorry for that. I trust he did you no more mischief! He has not bitten you?”

“No, miss—bless your kind heart—and it was not the poor dog’s fault neither. Of course he flew at me, seeing me in rags like these—that is dog’s nature. Moreover I deserved it, for, like a thief in the night, I clambered over yonder wall.”

“Clambered over the wall?”

“Yes, miss; otherwise I should never have been let in at all, and should thereby have missed seeing you, and getting this gentleman’s money.”

“It was very lucky for you,” said Kate, gravely, “notwithstanding your meeting with Nero, that you got over the wall where you did; for almost anywhere else you must have been seen from the house,

and the constable would have been sent after you."

"Yes; but he is used to outrun the constable," remarked Maurice, "that is, if the history he told me about himself, the other night, be correct."

"What history was it, sir?" inquired the beggar, coolly; "for I give so many different accounts of myself, that I can't pretend to remember."

"Well, I confess that at the time, I was persuaded what you said was true," said Glyn; "but, if 'tis a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive, it is equally certain that after but a little trying, there's nothing easier than lying. Your story was (of course) that you had once seen better days, but had outrun the constable, and been obliged to flee the country, leaving your family in England; and that now you were returning, after many years' exile, just to see your daughter's face before you died."

“And a very pretty piece of patter, too,” observed the beggar, critically.—“So it took you in, sir, did it?”

“Then it was *not* true?” inquired Kate with severity. “Do you mean to say, unhappy man, that you invent these sorrows, these misfortunes, only to play upon other people’s feelings?”

(“Yes; like those unprincipled writers of fiction,” muttered Maurice.)

“Have you no real troubles of your own, then, besides that poverty which, I fear, is but the fruit of your own idleness or vices?”

“Nay, young lady, I have some troubles of my own,” answered the old man hoarsely, “nor is the cause of my poverty so entirely selfish as you suppose. Something at least of the story I told was true enough. I *have* been long abroad, and though a man has no home, the coming back to one’s own land—— But there; this gentleman will say that I am only plying my trade upon you.”

“Never mind him. Listen to *me*,” answered Kate, impatiently. “You spoke of your daughter parted from you these many years. Have you seen her?”

“Yes.”

“And why did you not remain with her, instead of following this wretched mode of life?”

“I have seen her, but she has not seen me, young lady. She is rich in comparison with me, yet poor enough. Why should I—a ragged vagabond, as you see—make myself known, and shame her? You do not know, pretty mistress, and may you never know, what poverty is. A great evil to all, but most hated (because most dreaded) by those who are themselves only a little removed from it.”

“Lend me money, Mr. Glyn,” whispered Kate, excitedly. “Let me have whatever is in your purse. There is something about this unhappy man which moves me beyond

measure. I feel as if I should never forgive myself if I did not help him all I could.— See, here is money for you—gold. If your daughter is in the circumstances you represent, perhaps your possession of it may smooth your way with her, though I cannot think she could be otherwise than pleased to find her father, no matter what his circumstances. If more be necessary, it shall be forthcoming, although I can but ill afford it.”

She held out her hand with three shining pieces in its palm, but the mendicant made no corresponding movement, but gazed upon her pitying face with the same yearning look as before.

“You hesitate,” said she, gravely; “I am afraid you are deceiving me. That would be a very cruel and deceitful act.”

“I am not deceiving you, young lady,” answered the beggar. The money is more than enough. But—you are so kind that

nothing seems impossible—might I ask—I would rather have it than one of these pounds—for the little black cross that you wear about your neck?—so that when I look upon it I may always say: ‘This was given to me by the kindest, fairest human creature that ever I met.’”

“I cannot part with that cross,” answered Kate simply, “because it was my dear father’s gift. But I will gladly make you a present of this jet bracelet, if the possession of it would be likely to move your heart towards good.”

“Forgive me, my dear Miss Irby,” interposed Maurice, “but remember that this man may be merely a clever hypocrite, a begging-letter impostor, used to——”

But even while he spoke the bracelet had changed hands as the money had already done.

“God bless you, young lady!” exclaimed the beggar, fervently. “I can give you

nothing, repay you nothing, but only pray that He who is the poor man's friend may one day discharge my debt.—I am obliged to you, sir, too, although you are so suspicious of me; and if ever the lion should need the mouse's help, he shall have it.”

“Thank you,” returned Maurice, coldly. “If I am ever caught in a net, I will send for you.—But in the meantime,” continued he, stepping forward, “lest you should chance to meet with Nero again, or with persons less soft-hearted than this young lady, I will see you safe out at the gate.”

“As you please, sir,” said the mendicant, humbly.

“Good-bye,” said Kate. “May you live for the future with your friends, and follow this miserable course of life no longer. I trust, for your sake, that I shall never see your face again.”

The mendicant's head fell forward, as

though in meek assent, and turning abruptly away, he limped off by the young man's side.

"You have made a good haul, my friend, this morning," observed the latter, breaking silence for the first time as they neared the gate.

"Yes, sir."

"And yet you don't seem in such spirits as we would expect a man to be who, seldom seeing a shilling, finds himself with three sovereigns in his pocket."

"Do I not, sir? I am sure I am very thankful for what I have got."

"Why, the starch seems all taken out of you, my man. You are not half the witty rogue you were when I saw you in town. Perhaps you are thinking that you might have made a deal more out of this matter, if you had been wise. Look here; that bracelet is not a bit of good to you; it is not worth ten shillings, and you will never get a

crown upon it at the pop-shop. Yet I will give you a couple of pounds for it."

"You are fond of the young lady, are you, sir?" returned the beggar, quietly. "I hope, if you become her husband, you will be kind to her, as indeed I think you will.—No, sir; I cannot part with the bracelet."

"Nonsense, man! See, here is the gate. Would it not be well to take the road with five pounds in your pocket instead of three? It is only stepping with me to the vicarage yonder for the money."

"No, young gentleman. If ever you grow to be old and penniless, and to wander about the world for ten long years without a soul ever wishing you God-speed—— But there; that's patter.—Good-bye to you, sir."

"That's an odd fish," observed Maurice Glyn, reflectively, as he watched the old man limp wearily along the dusty road: "a very, very queer beggar, if indeed begging is

his proper vocation. He is a well-spoken fellow, notwithstanding his rags, and he refused to go up to the house for food, as though he did not relish broken victuals. I think I perceive a grand opportunity for the creation of a character. Let us suppose him to be a decayed nobleman—but no ; in that case, he would have got more out of Miss Kate, and not have refused to sell me her bracelet. Decayed noblemen—so far as my experience goes—are not more sentimental than other noblemen. There is one thing certain, however, that the poor old fellow has not long to play his part in the world ; whatever is the nature of the performance, it will soon be over. What a churchyard cough he had !—or, even if it were feigned—how ill and worn he looked ! I daresay he deserves it ; but it must be very bad to be old and ill, and to be flown at by Newfoundland dogs on account of one's personal appearance.”

CHAPTER XII.

A WOMAN OF BUSINESS.

IT was doubtless very unreasonable of Miss Kate Irby to give away three sovereigns (not to mention that jet bracelet) to a whining mendicant, of whom she knew nothing save what he himself chose to tell her ; but there is no accounting for the vagaries of impulse. Perhaps she was obeying a solemn instinct, perhaps she was indulging in a whim. At all events, it was not such an unreasonable piece of liberality as it may appear. Except at the moment of our receiving unexpected wealth, the time when we are most inclined to be liberal is when we are in the transition state between competence and poverty. The unjust steward never thought of forgiving anybody

his debts until he was upon the point of losing his stewardship. Moreover, this is especially the case when our impending loss and future circumstances are both indefinite. If we are to lose half our present income, and sink into some altogether inferior social position, three pounds do not appear of much importance in that schedule of expenditure which has brought on such a state of things; while, on the other hand, we have had no experience, as yet, of that condition of existence wherein folks "look twice at a shilling before parting with it," and in which three pounds seem "a good deal of money."

Like many other women who are excellent "managers," and diligently attend to all matters of the house, Mrs. Irby, while pluming herself upon that species of knowledge which is vaguely called "business," was in reality grossly ignorant of it. She scarcely comprehended the sources from which she drew her income, and as long as

she had enough money "to go on with," did not much concern herself with how it was come by. She had now for a considerable time been permitting her bills to run on and run on, and even obtaining loans from her banker, under the fixed impression, that when Sir Nicholas died, all would, at all events, be set right, even if her daughter was not made a great heiress. At the least (for Richard had told her that himself), there would be five hundred pounds at Kate's disposal as soon as she came of age ; but she did not like to dwell upon so pitiful a result to her great expectations. Then there was always Richard "to fall back upon, as it were." In her secret heart, she did not much care about the young man for his own sake ; but as the probable heir of Sir Nicholas, she esteemed him highly. He evidently loved Kate, and as his wife, she would probably do him a great deal of good : "He only wanted some one to look

after him, poor fellow ; his uncle had so snubbed him all his life that he had never known the meaning of a home ; there was a good deal of good about Richard ;" &c. &c. In short, Madam endeavoured to express to herself, as euphoniously as she could, the fact that Richard Anstey was a good match for her daughter, notwithstanding a secret misgiving that he was a bad man.

But it was a cruel disappointment to her when his letter arrived, telling that not even that wretched five hundred pounds were left to Kate. It seemed to the widow that there was now no choice but to have him for her son-in-law ; and somehow, although she favoured his addresses, she would rather that there had been a choice in that matter. She was unaware that he had already offered himself to Kate, and been refused ; but if she had known it, she would still have come to the same conclusion. "Circumstances," she would have said (for her philosophy

was proverbial), "alter cases;" and when the opportunity occurred again, as without doubt it would (for was not her darling a prize to be sought again and again by any man?), Kate must not say "No," but "Yes." It would be madness for her to reject him now.

Mrs. Irby, however, knew her daughter far too well to give utterance to this practical idea. She had pushed Richard's letter across the breakfast-table that morning without any observation beyond: "This is bad news, my dear."

"So he means to keep the money, unless I choose to be his wife," was Kate's quiet remark when she had read it through; but the words were spoken with bitter scorn.

"It is worse news even than it looks, darling," said Mrs. Irby, ignoring this deduction altogether, "for the fact is we are grievously in want of money. Mr. Crozley has been remonstrating with me of late with

regard to our expenditure, although I am sure I don't know where we are to retrench : we owe a good deal to the tradespeople at Blondel ; and I have also overdrawn my account at the bank."

"I am sorry to hear this, mamma, but still more sorry to hear it now for the first time." Kate rose from her chair, and put her arms about her mother's neck. "Why have you not admitted me to your confidence, and shared your troubles with me?"

"That's just it, my darling. I do so like to see you happy," returned the old lady simply. "I am used to worries, and you are not, and I trust you will never be."

"That is treating me like a spoiled child, dear mother ; and besides, it makes the truth much more bitter when it comes to be told, as come it must."

"Yes, darling ; but I always thought there would be no occasion to tell you. If Sir Nicholas had only behaved with common

honesty, everything would have been paid off without our feeling the loss. I did it all for the best, as I thought, Katie."

"Yes, and all for my sake," answered the young girl caressingly. "I know quite well that Love has been your prompter all along. But it has been a mistake, dear mamma; and now please to make amends by telling me without concealment how matters really stand."

"Well, Kate, the truth is, although I understand business as well as most people, I don't quite know, myself; and if Mr. Crozley, the lawyer, knows, it's as much as he does. When your poor father came to his sad end, his affairs were in a terrible state. It's dreadful to speak of such a thing; but if he had *not* died, I don't know what would have become of us. He owed money to everybody, and yet he had realised all he could—among other things, even the advowson of the living which had been in

the Irby family, I believe, ever since William the Conqueror's time."

"I scarcely think quite so long as that, mamma," said Kate, smiling in spite of herself.

"Well, I don't know, my dear; but it was quite an heirloom, at all events. However, it is no use crying over spilt milk. He did what he could, poor man—insured his life in three different offices for a great sum, no less than fifteen thousand pounds; and because he had only paid a premium or two, a hard job we had to get the money. Just as if it had been his fault that he got drowned, dear, dear, or as if he had done it on purpose. They did pay it after a bit, but there were great legal debts to discharge."

"Legal debts, mamma? Did you not pay all his debts?"

"Certainly not, Kate. As for what he owed the racing people, I don't know, and I

don't care : your father never told me whether he won or lost ; he would come home after having thrown a thousand pounds away upon 'an event,' as they call it—shocking events, *I* say—as cool as a cucumber, and never take out his ill-luck in ill-temper with his wife, as some husbands do ; but I have heard, although he was very fortunate as a young man, that of late years everything went wrong with him. Those race-courses are sad things : if a man could win a little money, and then get away from them, that would be different ; but there, he is never satisfied—at least that was your poor dear father's case—it is just like the moth at the candle——”

“Then, besides the estate, dear mamma,” interrupted Kate, with well-founded apprehension of digression, “we had fifteen thousand pounds to live upon, or what was left of it after paying our debts ?”

“Estate ! my dear child—there is no

estate! We get nothing out of the manor whatever, unless it's the wall-fruit and the carp, which I had just as soon be without, for dressed alone they're tasteless, and stewed with sauces they're very unwholesome. The whole place is mortgaged to its full value, and Mr. Crozley says, beyond it. We have just the interest of twelve thousand pounds, or so, to live upon. I don't quite know what it comes to, but it's in the per cents quite safe; you can see my accounts, and there is not a penny I have not put down. I am sure I have nothing to reproach myself with, in that respect."

"But what do we spend a year, mamma?"

"I can tell you to a fraction, my love. Last year we spent £713 17s. 8½*d.*; and the year before that, rather less; now, this year it will be a trifle more, because of the new carpet in your own little parlour (which, however, I don't regret buying in

the least), and also of some repairs that were absolutely necessary: the oak-fence round the paddock was so rotten that Mr. Crozley said it was a wonder that the wind didn't blow it down."

"Seven hundred a year! Then we must have been living far beyond our income, dear mamma."

"That's just what Mr. Crozley said, dear: his very words to me only the last time I saw him. But then I always thought as Sir Nicholas would have behaved like an honest man, and, at all events, left us that ten thousand pounds of which he robbed your poor papa. That would have set us up quite nicely; and you should have had a new piano—that one you took such a fancy to in Mr. Lute's shop at Blondel Regis—on your very next birthday. But you must wait now, my darling, till better times."

"Never mind the piano, mamma; the

old one will do for me very well ; but above all things, let us understand our position—let Mr. Crozley tell us exactly how matters are, and what it is necessary for us to do. It seems to me that we ought to leave this house.”

“ What ! leave the manor ? Leave the place where the Irbys have been so respected time out of mind ! Leave all the poor people who are dependent upon us, and Mr. Milton too, who, I’m sure, is a very nice young man—with no new-fangled ways, such as curates so often have now-a-days—and there is nothing I dislike more than a change of clergyman ! It’s worse than a change of air ; and you know that the air away from Blondel always seems to me either too bracing or too relaxing. Then there’s the priory, which, as I have often heard you say, is what no other place has to shew ; and your own dear little parlour——No, no ; it would break my heart to see

you anywhere else; and I am sure your cousin Richard, or Sir Richard Anstey, as I should say now—although he does write cautious and prudent, would be shocked——”

“Never mind Sir Richard Anstey, mamma,” interposed Kate gravely; “let us look this matter in the face for ourselves, whom it alone concerns. As for leaving Blondel, I should, of course, be sorry to do that; but it is evidently impossible for us to go on living as we have done heretofore. This house—or, at all events, its grounds—is expensive to keep up, and quite beyond our needs: why should we not take some pleasant little cottage, like Widow Lintwhite’s, which is now to let, by-the-by, and where you could still be able to keep your pony-carriage?”

“No, my dear,” replied Mrs. Irby with dignity; “I have always been lady of the manor here, and if I am not to be so for the

future, I had rather leave Blondel altogether."

"Be it so, dear mamma," answered Kate cheerfully. "Now, what I should suggest is, to drive over to Blondel Regis at once, and see Mr. Crozley."

"Very well, darling — if you wish it — by all means," hesitated Mrs. Irby : "but there is no immediate hurry ; and really, between ourselves, I am quite ashamed to show myself in the town. The butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker, as the song says (for although there may be no candlestick-maker, there is an ironmonger who has not been paid for three years), they all seem to be asking for a settlement, and some of them have even forgotten to touch their hats. It's quite unpleasant, I do assure you."

"But, my dear mother, they have a right to be paid," urged Kate ; "and as for the

unpleasantness, all the shame is gone so soon as we intend to do our duty. With me by your side, to share your trouble, you will not feel it half so much. Let me ring for the carriage, mamma, and let us start at once."

"My dearest Kate," returned Mrs. Irby with gravity, "what you propose is simply impossible, and out of the question. I will go to Blondel myself, since you wish me to do so, but I go alone. I could not allow *you* to see Mr. Crozley on such a subject. It is not right for a young lady to concern herself with it. You don't understand these affairs as I do, my love—how should you?"

Kate smiled; she would much rather have heard how matters stood from Mr. Crozley's own lips; but she saw that by insisting upon it she should pain her mother. Mrs. Irby really piqued herself upon being "a woman of business," and resented any

interference, not only as an infringement upon her prerogative, but as meddling with a subject which she had by study made her special forte. She would, however, doubtless have granted this request of Kate's—as she did all others—but that she feared the plain-spoken candour of Mr. Crozley. She had no intention of any longer withholding from her daughter the true circumstances of their position, but she hoped to be able to soften matters a little in the recapitulation.

Worldly wise (and worldly foolish) as we have seen Mrs. Irby to be, yet the real mainspring of all her motives was, after all, no mean one, since it was maternal love.

Mrs. Irby, then, had driven to Blondel Regis alone that morning; and her interview with her lawyer was so protracted that she did not return until dinner-time. Her absence, and the suspense it necessarily

involved, was, however, mitigated to Kate throughout the interval—such are the agreeable opportunities which country-life affords—by the society of Mr. Maurice Glyn.

CHAPTER XIII.

STRAITS AT THE MANOR, AND FEARS AT THE VICARAGE.

THE report which the widow brought back with her from “my man of business, Mr. Crozley,” was dolorous enough. He had made her listen to him at last. She did not turn her eyes away this time from the picture he presented to her view : he had always done so faithfully enough ; but it was now absolutely necessary not only that she should believe, but act ; or else, he did not hesitate to say, there would ensue something like ruin. Perhaps, deceived by his client’s confidence in Sir Nicholas’s testamentary intentions, he had forborne to press her hardly hitherto, and therefore he was the more urgent upon this occasion. She

saw for the first time clearly the growing hillocks of debt by which her path was environed, and the dangerous abyss into which it led. Mr. Crozley strongly advised, as Kate had done, that the widow should leave the manor-house for some less ambitious residence in Blondel Parva; but upon this point Madam was firm. She shrank from the confession of poverty which such a change would involve, for the opinion of her neighbours was much to her; and she had another and still more valid reason for remaining where they were, at all events for the present. All her hopes were now centered in her daughter's union with Richard, and she read his character sufficiently well to know that it was best to treat with him on something like equal terms, or what at least appeared to be such. There was no external inequality in an engagement between Sir Richard Anstey, Bart., and Miss Irby of Blondel Manor, whereas

this there would certainly be if the widow removed to Acacia Cottage. So it was settled that the Irbys were still to remain at the great house ; but the pony-carriage was to be disposed of, the groom “put down,” and the paddock to be let for grazing purposes ; nor did poor Madam need to weave chain-armour for the fruit in the old wall-garden any more, since it was to be rented by an enterprising speculator in Blondel Regis, who would consign the bloomy plums and downy peaches to the London market.

It was touching to hear Mrs. Irby breaking this terrible news, as she considered it, to her daughter, and accusing herself of being the cause of their common misfortune. “It is little matter indeed to me, my darling, for I have not been used to comforts all my life, as you have, and can easily go back to my old way of life when I kept father’s house for him, and looked after the

dairy with my own hands as well as eyes ; but you, my dear, are not fit for such things ; you will never, never take kindly to poverty ; and, oh, I am so wretched when I think that it is my own foolish trust in a bad man which has brought you to this pass."

"My dearest mother," returned Kate, whose face was not only cheerful, but radiant, "the only thing that can give me cause for sorrow in this matter is to hear you thus reproach yourself, and estimate my own character so low. It would be shameful in one, with youth and health, like me, to bewail the loss of mere luxuries. One would really think that something like beggary was before us, instead of so much being left for us to be thankful for ; though I do wish that we could manage to keep the pony-carriage, for I know you enjoy driving so——"

"Oh, bother the pony-carriage !" broke in

the old lady ; “ thank God, I can get about on my own legs yet ; but it is your having to go without that new piano that bothers me, the old one is so ramshackly ; and then, again, we shall be able to keep no company—and I do like to see you shine, my darling—no, we mustn’t even ask Mr. Milton any more to step in when he likes for pot-luck, and far less entertain any strangers, like that nice Mr. Glyn.”

“ Well, dear mamma, but perhaps we may find that people come to us for something else than their dinners.”

“ Not men, my darling ; don’t you deceive yourself. Women will come for tea, and even for talk ; but if you want gentlemen’s company, you must give them meat and wine. Your poor dear father knew men well, and he always used to say, that the true way to a man’s heart lay through—what’s the name of the thing he tastes with, my dear ?—yes, his palate.”

“Very well, mamma, we shall see,” rejoined Kate, with a smile that had something of quiet triumph in it.

And Kate was so far right, that Mr. Maurice Glyn did not discontinue his afternoon visits to the manor, notwithstanding that it became the custom there to dine at mid-day—Madam found early hours to agree best with her, she said—and there was therefore nothing but “kettle-drum” in the way of refreshment; but Mrs. Irby would by no means allow that her theory was thereby disproved. “It is only that Mr. Milton happens to dine early also, my dear; and you needn’t flatter yourself that we should have that gay London gentleman’s company, only that he is sure of a good supper when he gets home; and even as it is, you see, the curate does not come up here so often as when there was always a knife and fork for him. That’s the worst of the clergy—and so I have read it was in

the old monks' times—they have always such a relish for good victuals."

This severe remark was so far justified in Mr. Milton's case, that he did not often accompany his friend to the manor-house. There was a good deal to be done in the parish just then, he said, and, as we have hinted, particularly in one part of the parish. Poor Joseph Grange being the only person in all his flock afflicted with blindness, he was naturally an object of peculiar solicitude with his pastor, and his reception at the gate-keeper's cottage was always cordial.

"It is a pleasure to see you, sir," the old man would say, with characteristic disregard of his own calamity; and Mary's welcome was as unmistakeable as her father's, though it was only given by her eyes.

The old man's bed had been removed into the parlour of late, his own apartment being very small, and the weather oppressive, so that the reception-room had even a more

humble appearance than usual ; not that furniture, indeed, or the lack of it, makes much difference in the eyes of love ; but there were other matters that might have put the visitor in mind, not only of the inequality, but of the unsuitability of the alliance he contemplated. As for Mary, her manner was perfection itself ; but her father fell so very considerably short of that standard in his behaviour, that the length of the interval might have well made a less resolute suitor pause. To a man blind as well as poor, to whom so great a social advantage offered itself, much was to be forgiven, but not the vulgar obsequiousness with which he treated his guest, and the coarse flattery with which he strove to enhance his daughter's merits. No match-making mother, destitute of that tact upon which the sex (too often fallaciously) pride themselves, could have worse played her cards, or more openly showed her hand to the

anticipated victim. The curate could not avoid perceiving this, and winced ; but then did not Mary shudder too ? “ This man of commonest clay,” thought he, “ has got a daughter who is an angel.”

But how was such information to be conveyed in practical shape to a city uncle ? The Rev. Charles Milton was not a man to be without a strong sense of family duty, but he had also a sense of what was due to all, including himself. Now, at all events, however it might have been in that bygone case of the pastrycook’s daughter, he felt he was past that age when an uncle is the best judge as to whom his nephew shall marry ; and, besides, much of that great love which induces a man to leave father and mother and cleave to his wife was already given to Mary. He had not as yet asked her to be his, and he resolved to delay this until he should have informed his uncle of his fixed intention so to do. If most people in his

position would not (as society, losing all patience with such conduct, would certainly have expressed it) “have made such fools of themselves,” it must also be remembered that some would have married, and not asked leave till afterwards.

If Maurice Glyn had chanced to spend a certain afternoon at the vicarage, instead of “just looking in” at the manor-house, as had now become his invariable custom, he would not have failed to notice that his friend began to grow nervous and uneasy soon after the post had gone out. When he came home to supper, he did observe that Charley had no appetite, and had got the fidgets; and in the course of the night, he was awakened more than once by a hasty walking to and fro in his host’s room. But the fact was, Maurice had a certain matter of his own to think about, such as, above all others, makes men selfish, and prone to think their fellows as happy as themselves;

and it was not until they met at the breakfast-table that he perceived, from the curate's face and distrait manner, that something was going very wrong with his friend and host. Then, indeed, his solicitude was aroused, and self-reproach perhaps made it all the keener, and more inclined for action.

"I have written to my uncle about Mary," said the curate, simply, in reply to his anxious questioning; "and until his answer comes—which it will do by to-morrow's post, unless he comes himself—I am afraid I shall be but a dull companion."

"Don't talk of that. What *can* I do for you?" was his friend's affectionate reply.

"Leave me to myself, Maurice; that is the best service you can do for me to-day.

feel better alone: I shall not even go down to the cottage; not until to-morrow, when I shall know the worst—that is, from the world's point of view, not mine. True, I have scarcely any hope that my uncle will

accede to my wishes; but in that case, I shall be almost as poor as Mary herself, and all inequalities will vanish."

"Yes, Charley; but—you will forgive an old friend—are you perfectly certain that, under those changed circumstances——"

"I think so, Maurice," interrupted the curate, gently—"I think she loves me for myself."

"Just so," persisted the other, thoughtfully; "but if it should turn out otherwise. This young lady has a father—and from hints you have occasionally dropped, it is not impossible he may be more mercenary—should she act under his advice, and decline your offer, what would you do then, old fellow?"

"I should feel, Maurice, that I had been mistaken—and—and—hope in time to find in Duty that happiness which I had too rashly counted upon to find in Love.—But there," added he, with vehemence, "God

alone knows what I should do—I dare not think of it. She seems to hold my very life within her little hands!”

How strange it seemed that this eminently respectable young man, so submissive to authority in the abstract, and who shrank aghast even from the utterance of unlicensed opinion, should be so resolutely prepared to take his own way in this matter, at so great a risk, nay, at the positive certainty of ruin to all his prospects. But for his affection for him, the *littérateur* would have regarded the curate (as an artist his model unexpectedly thrown into an attitude abnormal, but highly picturesque) with the utmost professional interest; but as it was, Maurice felt very sad as he contemplated that future which he thought he saw awaiting his friend. He knew what the contents of the letter which would arrive next morning would be, as certainly as though it lay open before him; and the

curate also knew, and although he had used the words "scarcely any hope," he indeed had none at all.

Mr. Milton the elder, vulgar and material in his ideas though he was, as any individual whom the City welcomes during office-hours, and dismisses to suburban villa at eve, was yet furnished with at least two poetical elements of character—the passion of anger and an implacable purpose. That episode of the pastrycook's daughter, although popular enough in undergraduate circles, had never reached his ears; he did not conceive it possible that his nephew and heir could choose a wife that was not in a position of life at least equal to his own; or that, having chosen, he should venture to adhere to that choice in defiance of his will. If he should presume to do so, however, he would be at no loss how to deal with such audacity. It is not only persons of large landed estates and hereditary titles who are tyrants, and

treat their dependents as slaves; nor was Brutus the last man who has sacrificed paternal love to other feelings—not necessarily patriotic ones.

Revolving this matter in his mind, and attaching that greater value to his conclusions, which we are apt to do when considering a friend's affairs and not our own, Maurice Glyn paced alone the vicarage garden, and presently passing through its wicket-gate, took for a furlong his accustomed way; then suddenly branched off into a footpath, which led him by so circuitous a route that he did not arrive at the manor until late in the afternoon.

CHAPTER XIV.

HIDDEN DEPTHS IN THE CURATE.

IF our joys fall short of our expectations, our sorrows are, on the other hand, rarely so painful as the suspense which precedes them. When Charles Milton got his uncle's letter, harsh as were its contents, and even more resolutely set against his wishes than he had apprehended, still he now knew the worst, and could find relief in action.

“If you demean yourself by this alliance,” wrote the old man, in words elevated by passion far above his wonted style, “you are no longer nephew of mine. I disown you—I disinherit you; I will hold no manner of communication with you while I live; not a penny of mine shall you receive when I am dead. I would rather throw my money in

the gutter than let it go to you. Marry this beggar-girl if you dare ; then starve with her and the brats she bears you on a hundred pounds a year. I am glad indeed to think that I never bought you a living."

There was much more to the same effect ; but there were other portions of the letter almost tender, wherein the writer expressed his hope that his nephew would not disgrace him yet, but listen to his warning voice while there was time.

But the sentences above quoted were what alone seemed to concern the young man now. If Charles Milton had nothing else in common with his uncle, he had his determination of purpose, and he had made up his mind to make Mary Grange his wife. This resolve perhaps might have been sapped by tender adjuration, affectionate appeal ; but this attempt to carry it by assault not only failed, but rendered what before was

firm inflexible. He put the letter into his friend's hand with a grim smile.

"You mean to persist?" inquired Maurice, quietly, when he had read it through.

"At the risk of being a curate all my days," replied the other, cheerfully. "Yes : that is not so very terrible to me as it seems to my uncle. Now, you would not think it, but this very man himself wooed and won his wife when he had not half this income which he sneers at."

"Still, he married in his own rank of life, Charley. He has risen, not without pains, to one much higher, and he has toiled, hitherto, not only for himself, but for you. To your uncle, who has worked for it and won it, social position means much, and of course it angers him to see his nephew at one stroke destroy what he has wrought with such long effort."

"You are right, friend," rejoined the curate, gently. "It ill becomes me to

rebuke my uncle, but I cannot obey him. Oh, if you had but seen the letter which I wrote him, Maurice, this would seem a harsh reply."

"I don't doubt it, Charley. It is his nature to be stern, and when opposed, to become what seems to you cruel. Besides, a man who has made his own way in the world, as he has done, becomes in the process less nice and sensitive than those who, like you and me, are started on a raised level. He has worked with spade and barrow, and built the embankment, and laid down the rails; what wonder if his hands are rougher than ours, the mere passengers, who have only had to take our first-class places, and sit still while the train goes smoothly along the line."

"That is true, Maurice, and I thank you for pointing it out. I have indeed no right to blame my uncle; and, besides, I owe him very much, I know, but not so much as

he demands here, by way of repayment : I must tell him that."

"Yes, but not now," said Glyn, as the curate seated himself at his desk, as if to write. "There are hours to spare before the post goes out. Take time to think about it."

"Nothing will alter my resolution, Maurice."

"Yet I say take time."

"Ah, I see what you mean, friend. Well, I will see her first, and then write. I begged you yesterday to leave me ; to-day, I ask you to stay here, or at least to be here when I return. By then, I shall know what to write home, or to what was my home."

"I will stay here till you come back, Charley : but—look here, old friend—don't be too sure of what we two were talking about yesterday ; and if matters do not turn out as you expect, don't be broken-hearted, and don't be angry with the girl."

“Angry with Mary? No, Maurice. That, for certain, I shall not be. If I should have mistaken her, there will be nobody to be angry with except myself.”

To see the curate’s confident grave smile and cheery nod as he took up his hat, was a pleasant sight after what had gone before. He knew himself henceforward as one poor in this world’s goods, and who would grow poorer, with prospects blighted, and his only relative estranged; but, on the other hand, how secure of her whose love should make amends for all.

Maurice Glyn looked after him wistfully, sadly, as he strode across the little lawn and into the quiet street, then passed—still listening to his friend’s retreating steps—into his favourite haunt, the vicarage garden. He would not have long to wait, he knew; counting time by minutes, the curate could scarcely be an hour away. Yet how the minutes dragged along! The level marsh,

where once the sea had been, had his gaze, but not his thoughts; nor could the ocean itself, with its ceaseless roar, its boundless range, fill them as it was wont to do; nor the curved bay, dotted for miles with towers, each the counterpart of each, whose warlike use was gone. Earth's changes and the monuments of time are nothing to him that has one gnawing care: an eyelash inward turned makes valueless the most glowing landscape; and the toothache's twinge has force to abolish past and present, and fix our whole being's regard upon a single nerve. With a face paler even than usual, and eyes gazing vacantly on land and sea, Maurice Glyn paced the grassy walk, his ears attentive for the curate's returning step. The deep quiet of the country was around him, and what wind there was blew from the quarter whence his friend would come. At last, along the unfrequented road, there is a far-off footfall. Can it be his, that slow

and lagging tread, so different from the firm elastic stride with which he started? Yes, it stops at the gate on the other side of the house, and comes up the gravel-path, like the step of one who follows a dead friend to his grave, and then the study-door is opened, closed, and locked.

“Poor Charley; Heaven help him!” muttered Maurice. “But it is surely better thus: the cup is bitter, but who would not rather drain it—if his mind were free to judge—than live a life full of disease and pain? The day will come when the patient will be grateful; and even if the physician get no thanks, the good is done. If I were in his place, and Kate—— But there, that’s nonsense.”

He entered the house, and knocked softly at the study-door. There was no verbal answer, but almost at once the curate unlocked it, and stood before him, pale and worn—for it is not years that wear, but the

bad days in them—and yet with no despair in his grave eyes; some wholesome tears, perhaps (for they were red), had cleansed them of it.

“You were right, friend,” said he, with the ghost of a smile, “and I was mistaken.”

“I will not say that I am sorry,” returned Glyn, taking the curate’s hand, “except for the present pain. In years to come——”

“Don’t Maurice, don’t. It may be or it may not—God knows. Just now, it seems that time—nay, that eternity itself has nothing of compensation in it. She did love me once; I am very sure she did, and oh, I would have loved her as wife was never loved.—God forgive the man who has come between us!”

“Amen!” ejaculated Maurice, fervently. “It is quite off, is it, Charley?”

“Quite; for ever. I can tell my uncle what will please him so far.”

There was an expression in the curate’s

countenance his friend had never seen there heretofore ; one which, if a ruffian's face had worn, one would have said : "How unmerciful, how relentless !"

"What are you going to do with that, Charley ?" Glyn pointed to a bank-note which the other was placing in an envelope.

"I am going to return the fifty pounds he sent me on my birthday," answered the other, sternly. "I wish I could repay him all I owe him."

"Are you speaking of your uncle ?"

"Yes ; who else ? I will never take a shilling from his hand again. His threat shall take effect exactly as he intended : it is only right that it should do so ; for it was to be the punishment of my disobedience, and I am disobedient still."

"This is sheer madness, Milton. What ! would you lose both bride and uncle—impoverish yourself thus, and for nothing !"

"No, not for nothing, Glyn," answered

the curate, hoarsely; "but for this letter, which has robbed me of my love, my life, my wife! Since he can write such words as these—draining my heart of health, of hope, of all—he has ceased to be my kinsman. Yes, I know what you would say: that I am a clergyman—a minister of God. It is easy for you to remember that." There was a spark of anger in his tone, but it died out as soon as struck. "Do not imagine that I wish my uncle harm—that I would not pay him reverence and duty where I could. But henceforth, I renounce his favours. I will take no gift from the hand that could deal a blow like this. She read it, Maurice—read here "this beggar-girl;" and the cruel words crushed out of her the love she bore me. They pressed it from her eyes in one sweet shower, then left them cold and lightless.—O Maurice, Maurice, it is hard to bear!"

"And her blind father, Charley—what did he say?"

“Nothing ; he only nodded ‘Yes’ to what she said. She spoke without his prompting. She said that since my friends had set themselves against the match—for she *would* read the letter—and since I should but have a curate’s stipend upon which to live—— But why repeat it ? If she had been a lady born and bred, she could not have been more discreet and cold. And yet it seemed sometimes as though she spoke by rote, like one who had learned her lesson from another—but who was there to teach her ? Who could have known, save you and me, that I was coming ? And coming with that letter—why, I did not know that myself. I did not think my uncle could have written such words. No, no ; she does not love me, Maurice ; you are right. It is all over.”

He leaned his head upon his hands, and stared before him with such a hopeless look as was pitiful to see.

“But since it is so, Milton,” urged

Maurice Glyn, "why make the matter worse, by breaking with your uncle?"

"Ah, you do not understand that?" returned the curate, bitterly. "You would have me fat and sleek, and kiss the hand that pampers when it does not chance to crush. Well, we will not discuss that matter. Help me rather to forget; that is the kindest service you can do me now. Take another pipe in the garden, old fellow, while I get this letter off my mind; and then we will walk out together where you will."

For the first time during their long companionship, Maurice Glyn felt himself weaker than his friend, and did as he was bid. The soothing weed was wont to be very grateful to him; under its influence, he dreamed his fairest dreams, nurtured his fondest ambitions, and thought the thoughts, which, though losing much in the process of expression, others were yet well pleased to read; but to-day the charm might not work.

Notwithstanding the bright future that seemed opening for himself, and which but yesterday had given to all things such a golden tinge, Maurice Glyn had never felt more wretched; and, indeed, he had good reason for his sorrow.

CHAPTER XV.

SIR RICHARD "ASKS MAMMA."

SIR NICHOLAS being dead, there was of course an end to Dubarrydom. It would ill become this respectable history to follow the subsequent fortunes of Lippy, of Leonard, or of Charles. As for Meg, an apology is perhaps due to Society for having ever mentioned her. Such people, it seems, must exist, but their existence ought to be ignored. With respect to these unlawful children, then, it will be sufficient to hazard a conjecture, that the two last-named settled down—having tolerably good incomes secured to them—into gentlemen-farmers, on speaking terms with members of the county hunt, but scarcely with their wives and daughters. Lippy, who, even at that early

age at which he was introduced to our notice, had exhibited taste with his pencil, went abroad with his mother to Rome, and (let us suppose) became a painter—a profession in which genealogy is not of much consequence.

At the same time, it must be confessed that the effects of the bar sinister are not always so unpleasant as rigid morality would desire. It is a question not so much of principle as of comparison. The illegitimate descendants of a monarch, for instance, are held in the highest honour, and become the principal ornaments of an hereditary peerage; even those of an earl, if he is very rich, and has left them well provided for, are by no means looked down upon in the country, and hunt in scarlet without incurring objectionable inuendos with respect to the colour. But Society must draw the line somewhere (or where are we?), and she draws it—with her

usual exquisite discrimination—just above baronets.

Yes; to borrow the delicate expression more than once made use of in the servants' hall, "the whole lot of them left-handed ones had to clear out" from the Court on the accession of the rightful heir. The whole affair might have furnished another allegory for the author of that celebrated ceiling-piece in the great drawing-room, Vice fleeing before Virtue. Sir Richard Anstey, Bart., reigned in his ancestral halls alone, and was condoled with upon the domestic affliction which had befallen him by all the families in the neighbourhood, and especially by those which included marriageable daughters. It was not unknown that he had been paying his addresses to Miss Kate Irby, but it was rumoured that the affairs of that young lady's mamma had become greatly embarrassed: since Sir Nicholas had died without a will, she had no longer even expectations;

and it was not to be expected that a young man in so brilliant a position as Sir Richard would throw himself away upon a portionless girl. Marriage between cousins, too, a matter always to be deprecated, is more especially so when the lady has no compensation-balance at her banker's.

There was no dispute about the late baronet's intestacy. Even Mr. James Hoskins thought it as likely as not that Sir Nicholas had destroyed the will which he had witnessed; and since that intruder, who had beheld a certain occurrence through the window of the Blue Parlour, had made no sign of what he had seen, the whole affair might be considered concluded, and Sir Richard felt himself tolerably secure.

Tolerably, but far from absolutely. That haggard triumphant face, which had somehow contrived to borrow the lineaments of the dead, had peered in upon him in imagination for many nights and days, although

its visits were now growing less frequent. Gardeners, park-keepers, lodge-keepers, had been keenly questioned as to whether an ill-looking tramp had not been seen about the place on the day on which the late baronet died ; but they all agreed, not only in denying it, but in affirming that so great was their vigilance and circumspection, that no such wretch could possibly have set foot in the Court precincts : with which statement their new lord and master had perforce to be content.

Sir Richard Anstey was not, as we have hinted, by nature genial, or greatly given to society ; like many other disagreeable persons, he shewed his bad taste in liking his own company ; but after a little, when he had got his uncle buried, and other pressing matters of business arranged, the hours at Anstey Court began to hang very heavily upon its master's hands. Pomp and magnificence are attractive only to the unac-

customed spectator ; they soon pall on him who is invested with them ; and Richard's thoughts began to turn again to the place where we saw them centred a few weeks ago—upon his cousin Kate Irby.

He was really fond of her ; he had seen no one else whom he desired half so much for his wife ; and perhaps the secret sense of having done her wrong, prompted him also to make amends for all by offering her wealth and title—provided he himself was included in the gift—as speedily as possible.

He had written shortly after Sir Nicholas's death to Mrs. Irby, expressing great regret that Kate had not been mentioned in his uncle's will—or rather that he had died without making one—but cautiously hinting that that omission might be practically remedied. He had (as we have hinted) composed the epistle with great care, making it as suggestive and yet as uncompromising as possible, and he was much chagrined at

having received no reply. Kate had insisted upon her mother's silence, and Mrs. Irby was not disinclined to humour her so far; it would necessitate, she argued with herself, the young man's coming to Blondel, and face to face with Kate, his capture would be certain. Sir Richard was not without his suspicion of the feeling with which his fair cousin regarded his conduct—the protestations he had made to her while the intentions of his late uncle were yet dubious, being very fresh in his mind—but still she surely could not but accept the very ample reparation which he had in prospect for her. He had endeavoured to hint this by letter; but since that had failed, there was nothing for it but to go in person and express himself more plainly. Even though Kate's indignation should be still so warm as to blind her to her own interests, her mother, at all events, was a sensible woman, who knew, and prided herself on knowing,

upon which side of the slice her bread was buttered—and her daughter's bread. There was now no doubt that Mrs. Irby's affairs were in a wretched state—indeed, that she and her daughter were miserably poor; and when Sir Richard took the train to Blondel Parva that summer afternoon, it was with far other feelings than those with which he had last returned from it; he had now scarcely any fears for the successful issue of his wooing.

As he had written no word of his coming, there was no vehicle to meet him at the station, so, leaving his portmanteau there to be sent for—for he counted upon being, as usual, Mrs. Irby's guest—he took his way to the village upon foot.

The manor-house, the grounds of which were always in a somewhat unkempt condition, already gave evidence, to Sir Richard's attentive eye, of increased scarcity of service, short-handedness above the common. The

rusty iron gates stood open now, and the great bell had been removed which was wont to summon the lodge-keeper; for the tenant of the lodge was no longer Madam's servant. Up the broad gravel sweep, furrowed by carriage-wheels—though the visitors were of no recent date—with the vast stables lying tenantless and silent on his left, Sir Richard strode unchallenged. The front-door was opened to him by a female servant, who, evidently a late promotion from the housemaid's closet, did not understand her business. "Her mistress was in the housekeeper's room," she said, in answer to his inquiry, "a-doing of the jams;" and she would doubtless have been equally explicit if that lady had been engaged in her ablutions.

"Was Madam alone?" asked he.

"Yes, quite alone: Miss Kate being somewhere about the grounds."

"I know my way to the housekeeper's

room," said Richard quietly : and the poor girl, divided between a sense of duty, which urged her to suggest the drawing-room, and a sense of relief from responsibility, which prompted her to let him take his own way, offered but a feeble resistance to his progress. With a cool "Don't trouble yourself, my good girl," the baronet preceded her to the room in question, and knocking at the door, obeyed Madam's somewhat tart "Come in." She thought it was the cook, and she happened not to be in the best of humours with that domestic. Without looking up from her occupation therefore, which was the tying of parchment over jam-pots, she addressed the newcomer with the following objurgation (for Mrs. Irby was not one to be afraid of her servants, as modern mistresses are apt to be ; not she. "If they chose to give warning, let them : there was as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it : " she spoke her mind) :

"Here's sugar enough, cook, in every pot for two pots, and it's a shameful waste: and just, too, when economy is so important to me, as you well know, and when one would think that anybody with their mistress's interests at heart would try to save a little. It's no use denying it, for I have dipped my finger into —— Lor, Richard! who would ever have thought of seeing you? The idea of that stupid hussy's showing you in here, instead of into the drawing-room!"

"It was my fault, Mrs. Irby," returned the young man laughing; "I insisted upon it. I thought I was old friend enough to be privileged to come and see you even though you were 'preserving.' There is nothing like a mistress keeping her own eye upon such matters. I am sure the jams at the Court were never to be compared with your jams."

"It is very good of you to say so, Richard; though, where money is no object, and one

may use the very best white sugar, everything ought to be first-rate. We are not quite so flush of money here, you know, though, perhaps, I may have laid rather greater stress upon the necessity for economy just now than was absolutely necessary ; but then, one can never put it strong enough before one's servants, and especially the cook.—And now I'll wash my hands, for they are all sticky, and join you in the drawing-room."

"No, no ; I must insist upon your going on with your task, dear Mrs. Irby. Besides, I want to have a few words with you, and we are less liable to interruption here than we should be elsewhere. It is a very comfortable secluded sanctum this of yours, and what a pretty look-out it has into the old garden."

"Ay ; well, it might be made very pleasant," sighed Madam ; "but it's all rather ramshackly : that old summer-house

yonder, for instance—quite a pleasant little parlour it used to be, where Kate learned all her lessons in summer-time when she was a girl; but now it's given up to onions and such-like, though it might be made as good as ever for a few pounds. I always flattered myself that we should one day have had enough and to spare to make everything nice about us—but there, it seems that it is not to be."

"I do assure you, my dear Mrs. Irby," returned Sir Richard gravely, "that nobody regrets your recent disappointment—the failure of your very reasonable expectations—more than myself. But mere pecuniary disaster is not like the losses which death inflicts." Here Sir Richard pointed to his hatband. "It is not irremediable."

"Well, I'm sure I don't know," observed Madam doubtfully, and without taking notice of his action. ("She had no patience with such pretence," as she subsequently re-

marked, "and had no intention of squeezing out one crocodile tear.")—"Time is a great healer—I found that after a bit, even when my own poor dear husband died—but poverty never lets you forget it. I don't mind for myself; but to think of my darling Katie—so beautiful and clever—being denied those little luxuries to which she has always been used, and which seem to be hers by right! And, indeed, between ourselves, Richard," added the old lady hotly, "you must allow that the money to buy them *is* hers by right. I mean those ten thousand pounds of which your uncle robbed her father, just as though he had picked his purse out of his pocket. It is a wonder to me that Sir Nicholas could die with such a weight upon his mind. You saw him on his death-bed: did he never allude to that matter?"

Richard had nerved himself for some such question as this, but he felt he was growing

pale, and that his tongue would stumble at the lie it was about to shape.

"Unless the wretched man quite lost his wits," continued the widow, pursuing her manifest advantage, "I cannot suppose but that he did."

But in this last remark, she made a great error, for it opened a door for her adversary's escape. "Yes," said he eagerly, "but that was just what happened: my uncle did lose his wits. He was so light-headed, that, among other fancies he entertained, he was convinced that he saw your poor husband looking in at his window."

"Lord-a-mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Irby. "That must ha' been his wicked conscience. And yet it didn't lead him to think of my Katie, to make up for the wrong he did her father."

"Yes, he did think of Katie, Mrs. Irby," returned Richard very gravely; "and that is what I wish to speak to you about. Sir

Nicholas mentioned his godchild with almost his latest breath."

"Ay, and if he had had time to make a will, it would, may be, have been mentioned there," observed Madam, regarding the young man fixedly enough. She could not be all conciliation, strive as she would. "You have just remarked, Richard, that pecuniary losses are not irremediable—why not then give effect to your uncle's wishes?"

"I wish to do so, Mrs. Irby—with my whole heart and soul, I do. It remains with you, or rather with Katie herself, whether I shall do so or not."

"How is that, Richard?" Madam knew well enough what the nature of his reply would be; but though it was in accordance with her own long-cherished design, her heart misgave her as she pictured this man lord and master of her daughter, and her limbs shook under her and her voice trembled as she reiterated: "How is that?"

"Well, it is very difficult to put the matter without offence, as my uncle put it," answered Richard with feigned reluctance. "A dying man speaks out, you know, as one in health does not like to do, and, in particular, he says for others what they cannot say for themselves. I desire, says one, for instance, that my son shall marry so-and-so; and the son may feel his father's wishes binding—especially if he already loves the person referred to; while, on the other hand, the young lady may not do so. The sick man exaggerates the effect of his last words upon all whom they may concern, and concludes that they will be obeyed. He looks upon the matter as settled, and orders his own affairs, so far as they are affected by it, accordingly."

Richard paused, and again Mrs. Irby unwittingly came to his relief. "Did Sir Nicholas understand that you were to marry my daughter, Richard?"

“My uncle expressed his earnest wish to that effect, dear Mrs. Irby; and although I placed before him the contingency of Kate’s refusal (for of my own desire to win her, he had no doubt), he refused to listen to me—he would hear of nothing but that she was to be my wife. Under this conviction, even had he had the time and strength for it, there was, of course, no necessity to provide for his kinswoman and godchild by will. What was mine would be hers; if I was heir she was heiress; and it seemed an unspeakable comfort to him—upon my sacred word of honour, it did—to feel that Kate was well provided for.”

“But he left the provision entirely in your hands?” asked the widow, searchingly.

“Solely and wholly, my dear madam. He said no word about making up for anything amiss; but I do think with you that those ten thousand pounds ought to be

Kate's own, and I shall take care to make them over to her, by settlement, upon our marriage."

"And if she—that is, if either of you," faltered the old lady, "should decline to accede to Sir Nicholas's wish——"

"The loss, my dear madam," interrupted Richard, positively, "must fall on the defaulter. It is, if I must say so, a 'p. p. engagement.' There is no other possible result. Your daughter must, of course, comply with the injunction. I am not a sentimental person, but I do respect the memory of the dead; and to make over ten thousand pounds of my uncle's property to my cousin, would be nothing less than to acknowledge the justice of an allegation against him which he was always resolute to deny. I thought I had placed all this before you in my letter, dear Mrs. Irby, although, indeed, it was a very delicate affair to express in writing."

“I understood you, Sir Richard,” said the widow, quietly; “and if I had not done so, you would have rendered the matter plain to-day. I would have preferred—and I should have thought that you would have preferred—my daughter to accept you as her husband under less unequal circumstances. I do not say she does not value you upon your own account; but certainly that would have made itself more apparent had she been not so poor—I do not say ‘or you so rich.’ However, you have my full consent to your wooing, Richard—as indeed you always had—and if you win her, as I think you will, do treat her tenderly, love her truly; she has been loved and tended all her life, and has deserved it.”

Here the good old lady, albeit but little given to tears, fairly broke down, and putting to her eyes the corner of the snow-white apron that was her shield against the jams, sobbed as if her heart would break.

"You don't seem to have much confidence in me," observed Richard, peevishly. "One would scarcely think that I was offering to make Kate Lady Anstey—a position which is just now making many a mouth water, let me tell you, as pretty as her own."

"That I don't believe," sobbed the old lady, indignantly; "I mean, as far as prettiness goes. There is nobody in all the county to compare with my Kate. You had better go and see for yourself, Richard, if I don't speak truth. She is gone down to the Cove, to gather water-lilies for the flower-stands in the drawing-room—a present we've just had from Mr. Glyn—you will be sure to find her down the lime-walk."

For an instant, Sir Richard hesitated as to whether he should ask a question about this Mr. Glyn, the mention of whose name recalled to him a disagreeable suspicion, or

rather the shadow of one; but the thought of seeing pretty Kate alone and at once overpowered all others.

“I go,” said he, with what was, for him, quite a genial smile; “and when I come back, dear Mrs. Irby, it will be, I trust, to call you no longer Madam, but (by brevet) Mother.”

If that was not a pretty speech to leave a room with, it was, at all events, the prettiest the speaker had ever made, and, like all sweets from habitually sour folks, it was very grateful to the recipient.

“Under his reserved and almost repulsive manner, then,” reflected the widow, “this young man has a kindly nature, which can show itself upon occasion pleasantly enough. That sort, depend upon it, often makes a better husband than your attractive pleasant gentleman, who lays himself out to be agreeable to everybody, but has no deep feelings, perhaps, after all.”

Here she sighed, and murmured to herself: "And yet I have no right to say that, neither," for her conscience reproached her with having levelled the shaft at "that nice Mr. Glyn."

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO IS COMPANY, BUT THREE IS NONE.

SIR RICHARD ANSTEY, Bart., of Anstey Court, strode down the lime-walk with the step of one the object of whose errand is assured. He had not anticipated much opposition from the widow, but she had offered absolutely none, and her acquiescence made the remainder of his task comparatively easy. Any embarrassment which he might have felt (and, indeed, had felt,) with respect to reopening the subject to his cousin, which she had so recently and resolutely closed, was greatly mitigated to him, since he could now say : "I have your mother's full consent, Kate ; nay, it is her earnest wish that you should become my wife." A much more satisfactory argu-

ment to use, even to one not nicely conscientious, than a feigned and forged one, such as he had not hesitated to employ with Mrs. Irby.

Thus confident, he walked on until he had almost reached the end of that fragrant avenue, and caught, between its final trees, a glimpse of her he sought.

In the calm backwater of the Cove grew the water-lilies Kate had come to gather, and she was gathering them after the following fashion—by deputy. She herself was standing upright, but her outstretched hand was clasped by Maurice Glyn, who, kneeling on the river-bank, reached forth and plucked the graceful flowers, and gave them to her, one by one, like one who works by time, and not the piece, and lingers in and loves the work he does. It was a pretty picture: she with the lilies close-clasped to her maiden breast, and he with his bright curls dripping in the mellow

sunlight, for he had just over-reached himself, and been well wetted, and the laughter of the pair over that disaster was still ringing round them : but to Richard Anstey's eyes the scene had no beauty in it, but was hateful. Perhaps the tumult of the bees above him made itself more heard, as he stood there, than while he was in motion, for there was a roaring in his ears, and his whole brain seemed dazed with sound : perhaps the summer air blew cooler from the river's surface than it had done heretofore, for a chill stole over him from heel to head.

Had Mrs. Irby, then, ventured to make a fool of him, or did she not know of this ? Or was there nothing in what he beheld more than a chance flirtation, which, though it drove him mad to look upon, he must needs treat as nothing ?

Not trusting himself to think upon the matter further, he stepped forth from the

shadow of the limes, and walked slowly towards them : still they did not see or hear him.

“These are enough, indeed,” she was saying ; “enough for both vases.”

“Then one more for yourself,” replied her assistant, gaily, again applying himself to his task ; “just to place in your bonny brown hair this evening, when ——”

“How are you, Cousin Kate ?”

Whatever may be urged to Sir Richard’s disparagement on this occasion, it could not be said that his appearance did not create a sensation ; in that respect, it was pre-eminently successful. Silent and sombre in his suit of black and deep-craped hat, he stood, waiting for some reply.

“The devil !” exclaimed Maurice, involuntarily, as he scrambled to his feet ; “that is—I beg your pardon—Mr. Anstey.”

Kate, not so startled as her companion, seemed to have even a greater difficulty in

finding her tongue ; she crimsoned to her ear-tips [“It’s only a flirtation, then, after all,” thought the new-comer], hesitated, and then coldly took his proffered hand. “How are you, Richard ?”

“Pretty well, Kate, thank you ; considering what I have had to go through during the last three weeks. I can, however, congratulate you, cousin, upon your good spirits.” He cast a meaning glance at her gaily-trimmed summer-hat and coloured garb.

“Yes,” said she, quietly, “I am very happy just now—very. You seem to reprobate my not being in mourning, Richard. The fact is, I never pretend to what I don’t feel. It is quite right, on the other hand, for you, who so dearly loved your uncle, to exhibit all the outward signs of grief for so irreparable a loss.”

An ugly look crossed Richard’s face, and at the sight of it—directed as it was against

the girl—the brow of Maurice Glyn began to darken.

“You do not seem to be aware of my presence, sir,” exclaimed he, in the quick tone that courts a quarrel; “and yet we have met before, Mr. Anstey.”

“If we have, sir, I had forgotten it,” replied the other, insolently: “you do not, on your own part, seem to know me very well, since you miscall my name. I am not Mr. Anstey, but Sir Richard.”

Before the ready scorn about Glyn’s lip could shoot forth in words, Kate stepped between him and her kinsman. “Hush, Maurice. What my cousin says is very true: but there is a misunderstanding on both sides. Let me clear it up. This is Sir Richard Anstey, Maurice, my cousin; and this, Sir Richard, is Mr. Maurice Glyn, barrister-at-law, and my intended husband.”

“And how long has this—gentleman—been so favoured?” inquired Richard

huskily, “and without the knowledge of your mother too?”

“You are curious, cousin, but your curiosity shall be gratified,” returned Kate with deliberation. “Half-an-hour ago, I should not have been able to introduce Mr. Glyn to you in the terms I have just used. My mother has not yet heard of our engagement, simply because I have not been within doors since it occurred. For other particulars—this is my nearest relative, Maurice, save one, and doubtless considers he has a right to ask them—I refer you to Mr. Glyn.”

By neither word nor look did the baronet so much as acknowledge the young man’s presence, but set his hard white face and piercing eyes towards Kate alone.

“I am glad you are here, Sir Richard,” observed Maurice Glyn in calm but constrained tones, “notwithstanding that I seek neither your consent nor approbation. It was only a few minutes back that I was

telling your cousin I wished she had some kinsman who understood such matters, to whom I could explain my circumstances. I have a few hundreds a year assured to me—of which I shall be happy to offer you proofs—and I realise about as much again by my pen. I shall therefore be able, I trust, always to supply your cousin with those comforts to which she has been accustomed ; and if I have no high social position to offer her”—here Sir Richard, unable to repress a sneer, shewed those unhandsome teeth he was generally so solicitous to hide —“there is nothing about my origin to be ashamed of,” added Maurice sternly, “although, indeed, there is no baronetcy in my family.”

“And you intend this man to be your husband, Kate,” said Sir Richard, as though his rival had uttered not a word, “whether your mother approves of such a match or not ?”

“My mother, I am very sure,” answered the young girl with heightened colour, “would never be an obstacle to my true happiness. I should certainly not marry without her consent; but, on the other hand, it is equally certain,” and here her eyes met his with earnest meaning, “that if I do not marry Maurice Glyn, no other man shall be my husband.”

Turning short upon his heel, and muttering something to himself that sounded like the quintessence of all curses, Sir Richard strode away without another word; at first, and while within the manor grounds, at a rapid rate, then loitering slowly, with lips compressed and hat pulled forward over his furrowed brow. Wandering thus aimless, he suddenly left the road, and took a foot-path through the copse. There was not much fear of meeting folks even in the road, and the shades of evening had already begun to fall, but the deeper gloom and

solitude of the wood were more congenial to his sombre thoughts. He loitered on, plucking here and there a tender branchlet, and stripping it savagely of its leaves : his heart was full of evil passions—rage, and desire, and hate. If he had possessed a despot's power, he would have laid waste a province, dishonoured her whom he professed to love, and put to death his rival by slow fires. Such men, when crossed, are mere wild beasts in cages, restrained indeed by the law's barriers and the scourge of the keeper Justice, but longing to be free to glut themselves with blood and rapine.

The birds that filled the cool green wood with song annoyed him as though he had been compelled to listen to a psalm, and the sober calm of evening scarcely less. As he stood hacking with his heel a hapless blind-worm that had strayed across his path, he heard a human step approaching from the direction to which his face was turned.

With haste, he slunk into the coppice to wait there until the intruder passed, and watching him through the leafy screen as he came on, his evil face grew darker than before. It was the curate, looking very grave and sad, and evidently deep in thought; but seeing the wounded worm upon the path, he raised it tenderly with his stick, and turned aside and placed it on the grass, then slowly moved away with head depressed and chin resting upon his hand.

Sir Richard with a clenching of his fingers and a muttered curse, looked after him awhile and listened, then pursued his own way as before, but at a much more rapid rate. Some object had evidently now presented itself to his mind, and made his steps no longer aimless.

From gloom to golden green the pathway passed, then suddenly to open sunlight. The limit of the copse was reached—a

massive stile—the trysting-place of many a village maid who now were dames and grandams—and beyond it the priory meadows with the grand old ruin set deep among them, its towers aflame for the tenthousandth time with the dying autumn sun. On his right, a very bower of leaf and blossom, stood the gate-keeper's cottage. The curate's appearance had reminded Richard, naturally enough, though by no means pleasantly, of Mary Grange, and it was she whom he was now about to visit. Suppose he were to marry her! She was fair enough and fine enough for that matter, since, so far as look and manner went, she might have been a born duchess. Gad, how Madam would fret and fume! Nay, how Kate herself—after a little, when her children came and narrow means, and she got tired of this Grub Street fellow—would bite her lips for envy of “my lady.” As for the old blind dotard, Mary's father, he could

be pensioned off. Everything was to be done and got for money—at least almost. Perhaps this girl might be obtained at a less price than that of marriage. She might not be so coy as formerly, now that he was Sir Richard, and could command his thousands with a stroke of the pen. He owed her something that was not money, however—thanks to her shrill voice and that interloping parson, curse him!—and he would be even with the pretty jade some day. Was she within there, or had she not yet returned from her duties at the priory? If at home, there was nobody but herself to see him, that he knew; and she would not inform her father of his presence if she could help it.

Without any attempt at concealment, therefore, beyond the precaution of treading softly, Sir Richard skirted the little garden, all ablaze with flowers, and walked up the box-set path to the cottage-door. It was

closed and locked, and the key had been removed: it was evident that the cottage was tenantless. The window, however, was open, and he looked in upon the humble room, half-bedchamber, half-parlour, with a contemptuous smile. If the girl who took pride and pleasure in such tawdry prints and paltry art-treasures as he saw before him, could but see the glories of Anstey Court, she would hardly hesitate, thought he, to become its mistress on any terms.

Satisfied that the cottage was empty, he was about to turn away, when a sound struck upon his ear—half-groan, half-malediction—proceeding from some inner room. Sir Richard stole across the front of the house, and rounding its corner, cautiously looked in at a small open casement. The little white bed, with patch-work quilt; the few well-filled book-shelves; and on the deal chest that was both drawers and toilet-table, the bunch of autumn roses reflected in

the tiny looking-glass, convinced him at a glance that this was Mary's room. The neighbour casement was open likewise, and through it once more proceeded the sound of one in pain, mixed with another that shewed the sufferer was no patient in the adjective sense. He caught even a smothered oath. It was a man's deep voice, but not old Joseph's; and besides, the gate-keeper was never known to swear. Who, then, could this be? Richard had never heard that the Granges took in a lodger, nor, indeed, had they apparently any room for one. This mysterious guest, too, was an invalid: the cottage was a hospital. This second window was smaller than the former one, and placed in an angle almost out of sight, it would have probably escaped Richard's notice altogether, but for the groaning which issued from it, and which was much louder than when heard in the principal apartment. Stepping noiselessly upon the turf, Sir

Richard stooped beneath the sill, and slowly raised himself till his eyes were at its level.

Another pair of eyes—belonging to one who, although in bed, had been wheeled close to the casement, in order to catch every breath of summer air—encountered his own at less than a yard of distance. They had met before—that sick man and he—certainly once, although not quite so near—when his uncle, Sir Nicholas, lay dead in the Blue Parlour; but it was suddenly borne in upon Richard that they had met more than once. Nor was the recognition only upon his side.

“Robert Irby!” exclaimed the one: “impostor, felon, tramp! What! you are alive and in hiding at your own place, are you?”

“Richard Anstey!”

The sick man’s hand involuntarily sought his pillow; but ere he could bring forth

the weapon that lay concealed there, and raise his feeble frame above the window-sill, Sir Richard had plunged into the copse.

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